MY BLOOD OF THE (NEW) COVENANT: AN ASSESSMENT OF RENÉ GIRARD’S SOTERIOLOGY IN LIGHT OF THE COVENANTAL MILIEU OF THE LAST SUPPER SAYINGS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Benjamin J. Burkholder

May 2015
Copyright by

Benjamin J. Burkholder

2015
MY BLOOD OF THE (NEW) COVENANT: AN ASSESSMENT OF RENÉ GIRARD’S SOTERIOLOGY IN LIGHT OF THE COVENANTAL MILIEU OF THE LAST SUPPER SAYINGS

By

Benjamin J. Burkholder

Approved March 16, 2015

William M. Wright IV, Ph.D.  Bogdan G. Bucur, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology  Associate Professor of Theology
(Committee Chair)  (Committee Member)

Elisabeth T. Vasko, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Theology  (Committee Member)
(Committee Member)

James Swindal, Ph.D.
Dean, McAnulty School of Liberal Arts

Maureen R. O’Brien, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Theology  Associate Professor of Theology
ABSTRACT

MY BLOOD OF THE (NEW) COVENANT: AN ASSESSMENT OF RENÉ GIRARD’S SOTERIOLOGY IN LIGHT OF THE COVENANTAL MILIEU OF THE LAST SUPPER SAYINGS

By
Benjamin J. Burkholder
May 2015

Dissertation supervised by William M. Wright IV.

This study assesses René Girard’s claims regarding the Gospels’ understanding of Jesus’ death. Though Girard contends that the Gospels never depict Jesus’ death as an atonement for sin, there are significant passages that Girard avoids discussing like the Last Supper sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. This dissertation investigates whether these central passages, along with other supporting texts in the Synoptics, jeopardize the viability of Girard’s assertions, especially when they are read in light of restoration theology.

The core components of Girard’s thought, his reading of salvation history, and the ways in which Girard’s followers have adapted his thought are adumbrated in the opening chapters. Once the Girardian approach to soteriology has been depicted with its various permutations, the research turns towards Israel’s hopes for restoration after the exile, including the reconstitution of its covenantal relationship with YHWH, as they are articulated in the Old Testament and
intertestamental literature in order to establish the historical and theological context for reading the Gospels. After identifying the core components of restoration theology, it is argued that the Synoptic Gospels situate Jesus within Israel’s hopes for restoration and that this backdrop should inform one’s reading of the Synoptics rather than presupposing a polemical relationship between the Gospels and mythology as Girard does. After establishing restoration theology as the leitmotif of the Synoptics, specific attention is devoted to the Last Supper sayings along with other passages that, when read in light of restoration theology, indicate Jesus’ death reconstitutes God’s covenant relationship with his people by atoning for their sin. Should the exegesis and hermeneutical approach of this study prove persuasive, the conclusions jeopardize Girard’s global claims regarding the Gospels’ dearth of atonement theology. As a result, concessions or alterations will be necessary. The final segment of the study offers several ways in which Girardian soteriology could be reframed in order to account for the results of this particular study.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, Jennifer, who has encouraged, supported, and sacrificed much in order for this to be completed. I am forever in her debt.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This dissertation, a meaningful part of my education, would have never come into existence without the meaningful contributions of individuals too vast to name. Long before doctoral studies were ever seriously considered, Janine Pulse deserves much credit for assisting me in overcoming my fears and doubts about launching off into the uncharted territory of doctoral studies. Her encouragement was among the most decisive factors that led to my pursuit of further education and the birth of this dissertation.

This dissertation would also not exist apart from Duquesne University. I am forever grateful for the generous funding they have provided along with the support of the theology faculty who have shaped me academically and pedagogically in many ways. In particular, this dissertation would not have been what it is without the assistance and direction of Dr. William Wright IV who has journeyed alongside of me as the ideas percolated in my head and eventually took shape into this work. His timely feedback and cautions helped refine the work. The flaws and shortcomings of the work are solely my own.

Finally, I am indebted to Larry Cain who has generously provided of his own resources in order to aid me in the finalization of this work. With his assistance, I was able to devote the entirety of summer 2014 to writing. To those unnamed, please, know that your meaningful assistance and support have not gone unnoticed. I am filled with much gratitude for all.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Girard’s Soteriology and Salvation History</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Reading the Bible with the Girardians</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Jesus as Savior in Which Story (Part 1)?—Israel’s Hopes for Restoration</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Jesus as Savior in Which Story (Part 2)?—The Restoration of Israel as the Leitmotif in the Gospels</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Jesus’ Death and the Renewal of the Covenant in the Last Supper Sayings</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Assessing the Biblical and Theological Foundations of Girardian Soteriology</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Referenced</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AThR</td>
<td>Anglican Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td>Biblica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBR</td>
<td>Bulletin for Biblical Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTQ</td>
<td>Concordia Theological Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExAud</td>
<td>Ex Auditu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExpTim</td>
<td>Expository Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td>New Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neot</td>
<td>Neotestamentica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovT</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJT</td>
<td>Scottish Journal of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLSP</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLJT</td>
<td>St. Luke’s Journal of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td>Theology Digest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td>Vetus Testamentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Despite the shared affirmation among Christians that Jesus brings salvation to humanity, there has rarely been agreement on how he saves humankind. Some find it intuitive that Jesus dies on the cross in order to assume the punishment for sin. Others find such a notion morally reprehensible. Such disagreements have not been uncommon. One can observe how Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo?*—a text written about 1099 CE arguing that only the God-man could make satisfaction to God the Father as recompense for human sin—was shortly met with Abelard’s rejoinder that God did not need a payment in order to forgive sins.1 In modern discourse, such disagreement has only escalated. If anything has changed, it is the growing assurance expressed by some writers that atonement theories sharing some relationship to Anselm stand in stark contradiction to Jesus himself. One can point here to Nelson-Pallmeyer who argues that all the violent God images in the Bible should be discarded, and this would include any form of violence, even the notion of God punishing wrongdoers. Regarding the violent images of God buttressing many models of the atonement, he contends that Christianity and the Bible severely misunderstand Jesus.2 According to him, this cleansing of violent God images should include the celebration of the Eucharist as well since it suggests Jesus’ death is necessary for atonement. Such thinking, he avers comes from the early church and not from Jesus.3

In a similar vein, Stephen Finlan, in *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought*, follows up an analysis of Paul’s sacrificial metaphors of Christ’s death with a section entitled “None of This Was in Jesus,” in

---


2 He concludes, “…it is doubtful that the atonement would make any sense to Jesus in light of his image or experience of God.” Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2001), 156.

3 Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus Against Christianity*, 341.
which he argues that Jesus never thought of his death in a sacrificial way.⁴ Although Finlan does not ignore the presence of counterevidence in the Gospels—i.e. the ransom sayings or the Last Supper sayings—he doubts such passages stem from Jesus himself or, if they do, they were not intended in a sacrificial way.⁵ Instead, Paul and the Gospel writers introduce the expiatory meaning in the cross where Jesus never had it.⁶ Though almost a millennium has transpired since the squabble between Anselm and Abelard, the debate has only increased in the number of participants with little resolution.

Because new voices have joined the discussion, the soteriological debates have increased in complexity as different groups have identified flaws with both Anselm and Abelard. In the past few decades, feminist theologians have voiced criticisms of many traditional models of atonement. Because traditional notions of atonement, including satisfaction (Anselm) and moral exemplar models (Abelard), can be interpreted as glorifying suffering and further encouraging acquiescence in the face of abuse, some feminists have stated that atonement theology needs to be reformulated altogether. Instead of depicting Christ’s death as a glorious martyrdom, it should be seen an affront to evil in the world.⁷ One provocative criticism from some feminist theologians has been that atonement models like Anselm’s constitute a case of divine child abuse

---


⁵ The ransom sayings are those in which Jesus describes his death as a “ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28; Mk 10:45). The Last Supper sayings are the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20).

⁶ Finlan, Options on Atonement, 39.

and need to be abandoned since they perpetuate a passive approach to abuse. The fear is that if Jesus’ death is portrayed as God’s will from eternity past and is glorified as a good action, then women and children who suffer in abusive situations will consequently assume it is God’s will for them to suffer.

Modern soteriological discourse has certainly become quite interesting to say the least. Among the various figures reshaping contemporary soteriology, few stand taller than René Girard. In fact, it is hard to over-exaggerate his influence. Some commentators herald Girard’s soteriology as an entirely new theory that deserves to be mentioned alongside other traditional approaches to the atonement like Christus Victor, satisfaction theory, or the moral exemplar theories. Others realize that Girard’s influence has become so pervasive that their summaries of soteriology can no longer ignore it, but must engage it to remain relevant in the contemporary discussions.

Like Nelson-Pallmeyer, Girard sees the sacrificial interpretation of Jesus’ death as directly opposed to the Gospel message. Girard writes, “There is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice, whatever definition (expiation, substitution, etc.) we

---


may give for that sacrifice.”

In fact, he categorizes an interpretation of Christ’s death like expiation or penal substitution “as a most enormous and paradoxical misunderstanding” of the Gospel. Although Girard, as a result of Raymund Schwager’s influence, has become more amenable to associating Christ’s death with the terminology of “sacrifice,” he continues to note that in doing so he still sees Christ’s death as discontinuous with the archaic rituals of sacrifice. For him, Christ’s death is a “(self)-sacrifice” which is “against all blood sacrifices,” and hence their undoing. Despite adopting this qualified use of sacrificial language to interpret Christ’s death, Girard still sees the Gospels as essentially non-sacrificial in that they deconstruct sacrificial theology instead of seeing Christ as the ultimate once-for-all-sacrifice for sin. Any view that assumes Christ’s death is such a sacrifice, whether it is Anselm’s satisfaction theory or the Reformer’s penal substitution theory, is regarded as antithetical to the Gospels.

**Purposes of the Present Study**

For as revolutionary as Girard’s view has proven thus far, even those who regard his work favorably have called for a more sustained investigation of the biblical texts in relation to Girard’s work. For example, Depoortere notes that “… a verse-by-verse study of the New Testament in light of Girard’s theses and a critical evaluation of them in light of the letter of the Biblical texts are necessary if we want to consolidate his view on the uniqueness of

---


12 Ibid., 180.

Christianity.”\(^{14}\) This particular study seeks to fill in this lacuna by focusing on a select set of sayings in order to ascertain the viability of Girard’s assertions. At its core, this particular study asks whether Girard can reasonably and justifiably claim that the Gospels do not depict Jesus’ death as an expiation or satisfaction for sin. To anticipate the conclusion of this investigation, the research contained herein demonstrates that there are several passages in the Gospels that, especially when read in light of Israel’s story of exile and restoration, do portray Jesus’ death as a satisfaction or punishment for Israel’s sin and that this will limit and reshape the nature of the claims made by Girard and his followers.

**Limits of this Study**

Like all academic ventures, this study has its limitations. For one, the number of interlocutors has been narrowed to include Girard and his primary advocates, even though other supplementary voices are engaged. Though others could have been brought into the conversation, this study’s purview was limited to Girardian soteriology simply because Girard has produced a provocative understanding of salvation, which has gained traction with many Christian theologians in recent years. Its growing influence makes it worthy of discussion and evaluation.

In addition, to narrow the purview for this particular study, I have chosen to focus primarily on one of the passages—though, as we will see, this will by no means be the only passage influencing the conclusions of this study—that has the most relevance to this question: the Last Supper sayings of Christ as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels.\(^{15}\) Because this set of

\(^{14}\) Frederick Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard, and Slavoj Žižek* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 90; cf. 147.

\(^{15}\) While some theologians have identified the Last Supper sayings as problematic for Girard’s view, they have failed to extrapolate how they contravene his thesis. See Long, *Sacrificial Theology of Atonement*, 64; Walter
passages is one of the most explicit statements regarding the soteriological implications of Jesus’
death in the Gospels, they constitute the best candidate for assessing Girard’s claims. At the
same time, they will not be read in isolation. As will be shown, their theological implications
find support in other passages in the Synoptics with soteriological significance.

With that being said, I do concede this is a narrow selection of texts and the Gospels deal
with a good many other topics. However, since Girard makes a global statement averring that
the Gospels do not in any way portray Jesus as an expiatory sacrifice, it only takes one passage
to the contrary to challenge his formulations. In fact, in order for Girard’s soteriology to work,
his assertions about the Gospels have to be true on all counts. Any evidence to the contrary not
only obviates Girard’s claims about the Gospels lacking an expiatory view of Christ’s death, but
it also undermines his understanding of how Jesus provides salvation to humankind.\(^{16}\)

Moreover, I have chosen to limit the focus of this study to the Synoptic Gospels for
several reasons. First, the Synoptics share more similarities with each other than they do with
John. Granting that Markan priority is the best explanation for the Synoptic problem, they are
textually and theologically related. While one cannot overlook their differences, some of the
historical, exegetical, and theological information is applicable to all three. Second, the
Synoptics all have a similar retelling of the Last Supper, which differs from John’s account. It is
not that John lacks allusions to the Eucharist, for such seems to be the case with the Bread of
Life discourse (John 6:35-53). It is that he has not put it in his account of the Last Supper, and
this would make a direct comparison between John and the Synoptics difficult since they do not
hold the sayings in common. Finally, there is a concern for space. Analyzing John would have

\(^{16}\) One of Girard’s interlocutors in Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World observed something
along these lines and noted that “it is crucial that the non-sacrificial reading should demonstrate a clear superiority to
all the sacrificial readings that have been given so far.” Girard, Things Hidden, 185.
extended this particular study much further in order to integrate his unique style and theological formulations into the rhythm established in this study.

**Methodology**

This particular study will be a literary analysis of the Synoptic Gospels. As a result, it will interpret the Gospels as narrative compositions, seeking to read individual passages in light of the whole. Though it will draw upon other texts and historical events in order to read the Synoptic Gospels within their historical contexts, it will be a literary investigation rather than a historical one. As a result, ascertaining the historicity of any one saying, even that of the Last Supper sayings, is beyond the purview of this particular endeavor. To put it simply, employing the criterion used in historical Jesus studies is unnecessary in this particular enterprise because Girard’s soteriology rests upon his literary analysis of the Gospels as a whole. He never attempts to dismiss potentially problematic passages by labeling them as unhistorical. Thus, engaging in historical questions would be superfluous to the task at hand, though it might prove necessary in the future.

When it comes to the primary interlocutor, René Girard, this particular study will analyze him from a theological point of view, by employing the tools of biblical and theological analysis. One can question whether Girard fully fits within the rather rigid disciplines that comprise theology. Certainly, Girard would neither claim the mantle of a theologian proper nor that his work perfectly fits within its auspices. Rather, his work is a fascinating synthesis of various fields like literary theory, psychology, and anthropology, to name a few. As a result, his work is much broader than theology, and some might think it unfair to subject his work to such analyses. Nevertheless, Girard does make interpretive and exegetical claims about the biblical texts, the
very texts which are foundational for Christian theology. Furthermore, based upon his exegetical observations, Girard makes theologically relevant assertions about the cross and how this event rescues humankind, constructing a certain kind of soteriology. Thus, although Girard might not be exclusively working in theology, his work is theologically relevant, which is demonstrated by the number of theologians who have adopted his framework as their own. Therefore, this study seeks to dialogue with Girard where his work intersects with the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

The first chapter will commence with an introduction to Girard’s thought and his reading of the Christian Bible in order to give readers unfamiliar with Girard a solid grounding in Girard’s theories as well as his approach to the biblical canon. Following the summary of Girard, several of Girard’s prominent followers and adopters will be summarized in order to show their adaptations and their contributions to soteriology. Although Girard ignores the Last Supper sayings in his work, many of his followers have dealt with the passage and particular attention will be given to their exegesis of the passages when present.

The third and fourth chapters are two parts of a common argument. Together, these chapters demonstrate that the Gospels have identified Jesus as a Savior in Israel’s story as contained within the biblical canon. To reach this conclusion, the third chapter recounts the Old Testament’s story of Israel, her punishment in the exile, and the promises of her restoration, which continue to reverberate throughout important intertestamental texts. After establishing the exile and restoration as the story of the biblical canon, chapter four contends that the Synoptics
situate Jesus within this larger story of Israel’s exile and restoration and identify him as a saving figure on this basis, which differs markedly from Girard’s soteriological narrative.

After establishing a hermeneutical framework for interpreting the Gospels, the fifth chapter constitutes a focused exegesis on the Last Supper sayings in the Synoptics, with specific attention being given to their soteriological implications. Herein it is argued that the Last Supper sayings, along with other supporting passages in the Gospels, depict Jesus assuming and participating in Israel’s exilic punishment and thereby renewing God’s covenant with his people.

The final chapter, assuming that the exegetical conclusions of the former chapters have proven persuasive, identifies the areas of conflict between the exegetical results of the present study and Girard’s claims. In light of the disagreements, several of Girard’s theological claims need to be tempered or altered. After identifying some of the inconsistencies confronting Girardian soteriology, the chapter ends by identifying several options that remain for the appropriation and adoption of Girardian soteriology in light of the evidence adduced here.
CHAPTER 1: GIRARD’S SOTERIOLOGY AND SALVATION HISTORY

Girard’s work comprises a robust synthesis of various fields of study. In fact, his interdisciplinary approach that weaves together literature, philosophy, ethnology, and biblical studies constitutes one of the primary strengths of his research. This particular chapter begins with a short summary of the major theses informing Girard’s thought. Following the summary, there will be an overview of Girard’s understanding of salvation history as contained within the Christian Bible, beginning with the Old Testament and culminating in the New Testament. Both the summary of Girard’s thought and his reading of the Christian Bible will be foundational for later conversation with his followers and the conclusions of this investigation into the Synoptic Gospels.

1.A. Introduction to Girard

1.A.1. Mimetic Desire

Girard’s soteriological conclusions are built upon three integrated theses regarding the nature of humanity and the Bible’s revelation of this truth. Since his soteriology comes in the final thesis, the first two are necessary precursors for understanding his soteriology. Girard articulated the first of these theses—that human desire is mimetic—in his first major work, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. In this work, Girard observed that the great literary masters like Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Proust, Shakespeare, and Stendahl all articulate an understanding of human desire that departs from the common notion that humans autonomously choose their
desires and that desires proceed directly from the desiring subject to a desired object. As Girard describes it, human desire is essentially “triangular”—hence, not a linear connection of subject to object—because an individual’s desires are induced by the desires of another person, who functions as a model.\(^1\) Because a valued or esteemed model desires a particular object, others come to desire the same object, not because it is inherently valuable, but because it possesses value in the eyes of others. One has to look no further than the advertising on television to see some truth in his proposal.\(^2\) Every day glamorous and attractive people introduce us to products and services that we have survived without. However, seeing the products being valued and modeled by someone else with a higher social status often evokes desires for such objects within the viewers. In light of this discovery, which he finds present in the great novelists, Girard concludes that humans, most often unconsciously, pattern their desires after the objects—and these range from physical objects to the more intangible “objects” like beauty or wisdom—that others already desire or possess.\(^3\) Thus, Girard’s first thesis revolutionizes the typical understanding of human desires.

1.A.2. Scapegoat Mechanism

While mimetic desire can occur apart from conflict, the fact that other people induce one’s desires easily leads to conflict between the model and the follower when both individuals converge on the same object.\(^4\) This leads to the second important thesis of Girard’s

\(^1\) René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 2, 43, 61, 83, 183. This is not to say there is no freedom. At the end of the work, Girard indicates that one has freedom to be converted away from mimetic desire. While this is a more restricted view of freedom, it is nonetheless still present.

\(^2\) While Girard has persuaded me that *some* of our desires are mimetic, it is not entirely apparent that *all* of our desires are therefore mimetic.

\(^3\) It is important to note that Girard does differentiate between biological needs and his notion of desire. See Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2004), 11.

\(^4\) Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 9, 26, 45.
anthropology, namely, that mimetic desire can and will eventually escalate into widespread social conflict to such a degree that resolution can only be found through what will be called throughout this study the “scapegoat mechanism.”

For Girard, the convergence of two individuals on the same object or status of being mutually reinforces the desire for a particular object.\(^5\) The more the other desires the object of contention, the more it is deemed valuable, further augmenting one’s own desire for the object. Such contests are unlikely to remain isolated between two individuals. They, in turn, serve as models for other people as well. The more people involved in the mimetic contagion, the more compelling and attractive it is to the others in the community.

As the rivalry increases, people are likely to lose sight of the objects they originally desired and become more focused on supplanting the other person in what Girard—at least in his earlier works—terms the switch from “acquisitive mimesis” to “conflictual mimesis.”\(^6\) As the social conflict spreads its tentacles ever wider, the entire community is threatened with absolute decimation in the “war of all against all.”\(^7\) At the peak of a mimetic conflict, rivalries become much more volatile and the crowd can exchange its object of hate quite quickly. Near the zenith of the conflict, “the opposition of everyone against everyone else is replaced by the opposition of all against one.”\(^8\) Girard believes that: “… it is inevitable that at one moment the entire community will find itself unified against a single individual.”\(^9\) At this point, the wild pogrom suddenly morphs from a war of all against all to a “war of all against one” as it arbitrarily pins


\(^6\) Girard, *Things Hidden*, 26-9. He also writes, “Mimetism is a source of continual conflict. By making one man’s desire into a replica of another man’s desire, it invariably leads to rivalry; and rivalry in turn transforms desire into violence.” Cited from Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 169.


the guilt for the conflict on a single individual. 10 The community, unanimously united against a solitary victim, projects the guilt for the community’s problems onto it, believing “in the unshakable conviction that it has found the one and only cause of its trouble.” 11 With unassailable conviction, the community condemns the “guilty” one, the scapegoat. The execution—or sacrifice—of the presumed culprit does in fact pacify the community. The presumed reason for their conflict disappears, and this only serves to substantiate that the victim was indeed the culprit. Hence, the scapegoat mechanism is born, and it functions as a means of purging conflict and violence from a community.

According to Girard, the scapegoat mechanism not only serves to release conflict and violence in a community, it also serves to generate cultural order. 12 Because the execution of the victim brings reconciliation to the community, the scapegoat mechanism becomes the generator of culture by creating corresponding prohibitions and rituals. Prohibitions arise because people will be forbidden “to repeat any action associated with the crisis, to abstain from all mimicry, from all contact with the former antagonists, from any acquisitive gesture toward objects that have stood as causes or pretexts for rivalry.” 13 Thus, all of the precursors that led to the original scapegoat are banned in the community’s effort to insulate itself against further violence. Consequently, this system of prohibitions and taboos erects a wall of cultural differentiation that separates safe insiders from outsiders who threaten communal order. Additionally, Girard believes that the scapegoat mechanism generates rituals. In order to preserve the fragile peace within the community, they will try to reproduce the effects of the victim’s death by offering

---

10 Girard, I See Satan, 24. For Girard, this is why the victims are chosen arbitrarily since they are a part of this violent contagion.
11 Girard, Things Hidden, 27.
12 Ibid., 32.
13 Ibid., 28.
new victims that attempt to recreate the original setting as much as possible. Religious rituals like sacrifices are therefore attempts to remember and recreate the peace ensuing the death of the victim. As a result, fear of future violent outbreaks and a desire to preserve the hard-won peace generates the prohibitions and rituals of human culture.

The scapegoat mechanism also generates another important dimension of human culture: religion. Girard suggests that once the victim’s death brings unexpected peace to the community, they begin to credit the victim with numinous powers. Only a god, after all, could bring such beneficence. Over time, the victims are deified as gods, and the entire cultural order of prohibition and ritual is buttressed by the threat of divine violence and future catastrophes. Such gods possess the bipolar ability to cause malevolence if angered and benevolence if appeased. In light of this, Girard concludes that archaic religion is a profound misunderstanding of the nature and effects of mimetic violence, which simply deifies its victims, even though its desire to mitigate violence is not unwarranted.

Against this backdrop of human culture and its origins in violence, Girard then explains how mythology also functions to support the new cultural order. For Girard, myths, with their fantastic stories of divine-human encounters, are retellings of victims who have been apotheosized through the community’s retelling of the story. A brief summary of Girard’s analysis of Oedipus Rex, his myth of choice in many writings, will demonstrate his hermeneutics of myths. For Girard, Oedipus functions as the quintessential scapegoat in the myth for several

---

14 Ibid., 28. See also pages 48-83 for a fuller articulation and explanation of the various kinds of cultural order.
16 Girard, Things Hidden, 46, 107, 116.
reasons. First, Oedipus is unequivocally deemed guilty because he has transgressed two hefty taboos by committing parricide against his father and incest with his mother. Second, as a result of these transgressions, Oedipus becomes culpable for the plague decimating Thebes. In order for the plague to cease, the guilty party, Oedipus, must pay. Third, Oedipus is described as someone marginalized within the community: he is a foreigner, he possesses a physical deformation, and he is the king. For Girard, all of these indictments and descriptions of Oedipus correlate precisely with scapegoat victims that are always deemed guilty for the community’s problems. While many people treat myths as erroneous fictions, Girard avers that a myth is “the transfigured account of a real violence.” In other words, myths have taken a real event, a scapegoat lynching, and obfuscated the reality of what happened in order to justify the community’s actions. To put it bluntly, myths are outright conspiracies. The only accurate truth found in them is the community’s agreement that the victim bears culpability for the community’s strife. Ultimately, myths eliminate the victim’s voice when the perspective of the persecutors extinguishes the cry of the victim once and for all.

---


19 Girard, Things Hidden, 109; cf. 119. To substantiate this reading of myths as real persecutions, Girard turns to stories where modern critics will acknowledge the presence of a victim: Middle Age narratives of persecution that include anti-Semitic texts, witch trials, and records of the Inquisition. In these kinds of texts, Girard identifies a “half-way” step between the persecution that has been completely effaced in mythology and the persecution that is only partially camouflaged in the texts from the Middle Ages that cast inordinate guilt on certain sectors of the population. While these medieval accounts include the same exaggeration of the pernicious qualities of the condemned, they lack the deification and “sacralization” that is present in myths. See Girard, Scapegoat, 1-23; idem, Things Hidden, 127. “These texts are much easier to decipher than myths because the transfiguration of the victim is much less powerful and complete than in myth. In texts of persecution that have already been interpreted the victim has not been sacralized or has undergone only a vague attempt at sacralization” (Ibid., 130).

20 Ibid., 113-7.

Girard arrived at the final thesis of his work when he placed his anthropological findings of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism alongside the Christian Scriptures, which he did not do until he published *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World.* While Girard observes that there is much in the biblical texts that corresponds to mythology and the accounts of collective murders, he asserts that only in comparing mythology and the biblical texts can one discover the true uniqueness and message of the Bible. The startling difference he discovers is that the biblical texts vindicate the victim, whereas the myths inculpate the victim. One can point to various biblical texts that prove his point. For example, in Genesis 4 where Cain murders his brother Abel, the Bible clearly depicts Abel as the recipient of unjustified violence. Likewise, the narrative cycle devoted to Joseph unequivocally shows Joseph undeserving of a host of injustices done to him. Girard identifies this same tendency to defend the victim throughout the biblical texts. From this he concludes that the biblical texts are fundamentally opposed to ancient mythology. Instead of justifying the persecutors like the myths do, the biblical texts vindicate the victim and condemn the crowds.

Moreover, Girard observes that the biblical texts persistently repel the mythical desire to divinize the victims. Whereas ancient cultures divinized their victims, a process that is obliquely visible in mythology, the Christian Bible refuses to divinize such victims. Individuals

---

21 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 66, 309. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard made allusions to sacrificial crises being present in the biblical texts, but indicated that such analysis would have to wait for a future study.

22 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 141-4. Here he cites the account of the Fall, the flood, the Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, and Jacob’s theft of Isaac’s blessing as evidence of accounts with mythical tendencies. At the end of the section, he concludes, “There can be no doubt that the first books of the Bible rest upon myths that are very close to those found all over the world” (Ibid., 144).

23 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 146-7. For instance, the narrative of Cain and Abel shares many similarities with the founding murders of other societies like Rome where Romulus slays his brother Remus. Though similarities exist, Girard hastens to make sure that one realizes a significant difference: the slaying of the brother is condemned in the biblical account.

24 Ibid., 149-53.

like Abel and Joseph are shown to be human victims, but never gods. In light of the refusal to
divinize the victims and the continual defense of the victims, Girard concludes that the biblical
texts possess an anti-mythological thrust because they seek to undermine the scapegoat
mechanism that has surreptitiously formed human culture from its inception.

This is not to say that the entirety of the Christian Bible speaks with the same degree of insight into the scapegoat mechanism. As will be shown in more detail shortly, according to Girard, though the Old Testament progressively unveils key anthropological insights about human nature’s tendency to justify its violence, it never fully arrives at a complete, pristine revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. Moreover, it continues to perpetuate a view of God wherein he is willing to utilize violence in retribution and punishment, even at the points where the Old Testament seems closest to revealing the scapegoat mechanism. For Girard, associating threats of punishment with the divine constitutes evidence of mythical thought. Thus, by itself, Girard finds the Old Testament ambiguous. Only with Christ, as the hermeneutical key, is one able to look in retrospect at what God was revealing through the Old

---

26 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 200. There is some tension here within Girard’s thought. In an effort to affirm continuity with the Old Testament, there is a desire to see the Gospel as a fulfillment of the Old Testament itself and thus of one piece. If one posits too strong of a rupture, one risks reinstating a system of differentiation. However, Girard seems to jeopardize this at times when he describes the New Testament as constituting a “decisive break” from the Old Testament with its definitive vitiation of sacrifice.

27 Ibid., 154-8. For Girard, the prophets, especially Isaiah’s suffering servant, get as close to a full revelation as possible and yet never cross the threshold fully.
Testament. The Old Testament thus heralds and prefigures the revelation that is to come in Jesus and the Gospels, though it never arrives at this destination itself.

Jesus’ crucifixion constitutes the quintessential example of the biblical defense of victims. Like other classic examples of the scapegoat mechanism, Jesus’ crucifixion results from mimetic conflict, and the social forces—the Jewish leaders, the Romans, etc.—have once again found that the only way to make peace is at the expense of a victim. Unlike the manifold perpetrators in the crucifixion, the Gospel writers see through the charges concocted to indict Jesus, for the Gospels unwaveringly attest to his innocence. The Gospels do this in various ways, but perhaps the clearest expression of Jesus’ innocence is his declaration in John 15:25 that “They hated me without a cause,” which affirms the vacuous rationality behind the mob’s lynching of Jesus. At the cross, the scapegoat mechanism fixes its crosshairs on Jesus in the way it had so many times in the past, except something happens differently this time, which leads to its undoing.

In I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, Girard notes that the New Testament possesses a third point of correspondence with mythology that was missing in the Old Testament: the divinity of the victim. The Old Testament narratives of collective violence only include two of the three

---

28 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 256. Here he writes, “God provided the text, but also the hermeneutical key with which to read it: the Cross. The two cannot be separated.” See also his conclusions about the book of Job: “As it has come down to us, the Book of Job does not insist enough on our hearing the complaint of Job: many things divert us from the crucial texts, deforming and neutralizing them with our secret complicity. We need, therefore, another text, something else, or rather someone else to come to our aid: the text of the Passion, Christ, is the one to help us understand Job, because Christ completes what Job only half achieves, and that is paradoxically what in the context of the world is his own disaster, the Passion that will soon be inscribed in the text of the Gospels.” Cited from René Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1987), 163.

29 Girard, Things Hidden, 205.

30 Thus, Girard finds it significant that Pilate and Herod became friends over the execution of Jesus. See Girard, I See Satan, 132-3.


32 Girard, I See Satan, 127-8. Moreover, this is a citation from Psalm 35:19, which indicates that Jesus is suffering violence similar to what was faced by the persecuted voices of the Psalms. Cf. idem, Evolution and Conversion, 210; idem, Scapegoat, 102-4.
stages within myths: the initial mimetic crisis and collective violence. The final stage, however, the one in which “the resurrection … reveals the divinity of the victim,” is absent because the victims are never apotheosized in the Old Testament. However, the Gospels brazenly introduce this final element, placing the Gospels in a direct correspondence to myths on all three accounts. For Girard, this correspondence does not jeopardize the veracity of the resurrection accounts but serves to bring the revelation to its climax.

For Girard, the resurrection is the moment at which the tide that has engulfed Jesus’ followers in a sea of fear and preposterous charges, demanding his death, begins to ebb. The resurrection illumines the disciples who have been temporarily swept up in the pogrom against Jesus. Because of the resurrection, they become assured of Jesus’ innocence because God has definitely intervened on behalf of the victim. As a result, the disciples break from their solidarity with the mob and become witnesses to the innocence of Jesus. In the end, the death and resurrection of Jesus reveal the inanity of the human pattern of maintaining social order at the expense of innocent victims. Jesus was a victim that was needlessly put to death, like so many victims before him.

Finally, in the cross and resurrection, the scapegoat mechanism which had remained buried in the subconscious of human culture “since the foundation of the world” is clearly manifest for those with the eyes to see. For Girard, these events reveal the truth about humans. Moreover, this revelation becomes the vehicle of salvation because it constitutes the fullest revelation of the violent nature of humanity and demonstrates that human culture has been founded and sustained by the murder of innocent victims. In revealing this truth about human

33 Girard, I See Satan, 106-7; cf. 121.
34 Girard, I See Satan, 125; cf. 133-36, 189, 191; idem, Evolution and Conversion, 218.
nature, humans are invited to relinquish their penchant for mimetic violence and follow Jesus’ positive example of eschewing all violence. Thus, Jesus offers humanity a conversion away from the complicity in violence that has plagued humanity since its origins.

While the cross and resurrection reveal something profound about humans, they also reveal something about the nature of God. In the Christ event, humans are finally emancipated from “the illusion of a violent God.” Instead of being a God who would punish or threaten humans—which is equated with “violence” in Girardian thought—God is the God against such violence. To prove his character, “God himself accepts the role of the victim of the crowd so that he can save us all.” This is in direct contrast to the mythic gods that threaten to annihilate recalcitrant devotees or punish them with plagues. Instead of encouraging more victims, God in fact becomes a victim at the cross to reveal that he desires no more violence. God now offers human beings a better mimetic model, one free of violence and rivalry if they follow the model set forth in Jesus.

1.B. Girard’s Salvation History

For Girard, the saving revelation unleashed by the cross and resurrection comprises the conclusion to a long arduous process. The cross and resurrection were not surds tossed up on the shores of time, but events that finalized God’s attempts to reveal the truth throughout human history. With an explanation of the three theses informing Girard’s soteriology in place, we can turn to the manner in which Girard understands this revelation being progressively conveyed

---

over the course of the biblical canon. The following section traces Girard’s salvation history through the various stages and genres of the Christian Bible.

1.B.1. *Human Origins and the Fall*

Though Girard adopts an evolutionary account for human origins, his account of human origins is closely wed to the Fall. For Girard, humans separate from their primal ancestors at the point when victimizing scapegoats begins.\(^{40}\) In fact, he equates the mimetic behavior that culminates in the lynching of the innocent victim with original sin.\(^ {41}\) It is, therefore, not surprising that Girard’s interpretation of Genesis 3 emphasizes the presence of mimetic desire and scapegoating. For him, when the serpent seduces Adam and Eve into eating the fruit, the text betrays the problem of the first humans, namely, that they allow a being other than God to mediate their desires. Eve allows the serpent to mediate her desires while Adam allows Eve to mediate his.\(^ {42}\) In addition, this narrative of the Garden also reveals the scapegoating nature of human beings. When God confronts the errant humans, they try to affix blame on a culpable scapegoat. Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent.\(^ {43}\) Thus, in the traditional account of the Fall, Girard finds evidence that the biblical texts understand the nature of mimetic desire and its disastrous social consequences. Despite the corroboration Girard finds in this account, he still


\(^{42}\) René Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 324. He notes that the feminist reaction against the reading that blames women for the emergence of sin is the false interpretation that Adam placed on the events in order to avoid his guilt. The manner in which he manages to parallel Shakespeare’s works with his own insights into mimetic theory, requires him to reorder Shakespeare’s corpus to do so, which at least begs the question of whether he is imposing a structure on Shakespeare or letting Shakespeare’s voice speak for itself. See Ibid., 185.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 324-5.
sees the account of Adam and Eve as “mythic” when it ends with God expelling sinful humankind from his presence.\textsuperscript{44}

Fuller support for Girard’s equation of mimetic theory with original sin is found in Genesis 4 with Cain’s murder of Abel. Whatever was left unsaid in Genesis 3 about the primal murder, Girard finds on full display in the following chapter when Cain murders his innocent brother. Here Girard indicates one can see the lucid difference between the Bible and myth in full display:

The theme of the founding murder is not only mythical but also biblical. We find it in the book of Genesis, in Cain’s murder of his brother, Abel. The account of this murder is not a founding myth; it is rather the biblical interpretation of all founding myths. It recounts the bloody foundation of the beginnings of culture and the consequences of this foundation, which form the first mimetic cycle narrated in the Bible.\textsuperscript{45}

For Girard, the story of Cain and Abel is not simply an account about two brothers but the story about human culture more generally: human culture derives from the murder of the innocent. Moreover, true to Girard’s observation about the biblical texts, Abel is never seen as deserving his death, and Cain’s action is condemned. Thus, according to Girard, the opening chapters of the Bible depict the biblical intelligence of the victim with great acuity, even if they resemble mythical texts in some respects.\textsuperscript{46}

1.B.2. Patriarchal Narratives

In addition to grounding his mimetic theory in opening chapters of Genesis, Girard also identifies a significant development during the later patriarchal narratives of Genesis. In particular, the account of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 is significant. At the climax

\textsuperscript{44} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 275.
\textsuperscript{46} Noah’s escape from the flood and Lot’s rescue from Sodom and Gomorrah are other examples of the single victim escaping the threat of communal violence. See Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 143.
of the narrative, God forbids Abraham to sacrifice his son. In Isaac’s place, they sacrifice a ram. For Girard, this episode is an important first step in the process of deconstructing the human penchant for human victims present in ancient cultures. At this juncture, animal victims displace human victims in the sacrificial practice. Though sacrifice itself maintains its existence, it no longer needs to be sustained by human victims. Nevertheless, substituting animals for humans begins a process that will eventually lead to the dissolution of such practices altogether.

In the Joseph cycle of Genesis, Girard finds further support that the Bible defends victims over against the persecutors. Joseph, who is hated by his own family, sold into slavery, charged with attempted rape, and incarcerated, is deemed to have suffered all of these afflictions unworthily, which exhibits the biblical truth of the victim’s innocence. Despite rising to power and providing salvation for his people and the Egyptians, Joseph is never divinized nor does he threaten retribution against the perpetrators. As a result, Joseph delivers an excellent example of the Bible’s support of the victim against the accusations of the crowd. Thus, even in Genesis, Girard sees the beginnings of the Bible’s deconstruction of sacrificial theology, even it is not completely dismantled at this point in salvation history.

1.B.3. Exodus and Conquest

Although Girard does not write much about the Exodus narratives, they seem to follow in the same mixed pattern of partially revealing the victimization of the Hebrews in Egypt while also participating in the mythic delight of seeing divine vengeance meted out upon Israel’s

---

48 Girard, I See Satan, 106-120. Throughout, he is making comparison with the charges against Joseph and Oedipus showing that the charges never seem credible in the case of Joseph, but are assumed to be legitimate for Oedipus. Cf. idem, Evolution and Conversion, 199-203.
enemies.\textsuperscript{50} In addition, Moses seems to fit the characteristics of a “scapegoat-legislator” according to Girard.\textsuperscript{51} His inability to speak well betrays the usual physical deformation of a scapegoat. Moreover, he is deemed guilty for slaying an Egyptian, not to mention the plagues on the Egyptians. Thus, the book of Exodus again gives a voice to the persecuted Israelites and Moses who were victimized in the narrative.

However, the biblical book of Exodus contains more than just the Israelites’ escape from Egypt. It also contains the commandments and the laws that regulated ancient Israelite society. Based upon Girard’s belief that prohibitions derive from the scapegoat mechanism, one might expect Girard to utter an entirely negative pronouncement regarding the Old Testament law codes. Nevertheless, Girard is able to maintain a cautiously positive evaluation of the Old Testament law for several reasons. First, although Girard concludes that certain laws seem archaic by today’s standards, he notes that many laws were born out of the desire to suppress or even eliminate human violence.\textsuperscript{52} As a result, the end that, at least, some sought to accomplish was honorable. Second, some of the laws demonstrate an awareness of mimetic desire. For example, Girard cites the final command in the Decalogue as an example of this awareness:

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exod. 20:17 NRSV).\textsuperscript{53} Girard privileges this commandment above the rest because it most directly strikes at the core of human violence and conflict since it reveals the way in which one’s neighbor inspires

\textsuperscript{50} James G. Williams, Foreword in \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, xx.
\textsuperscript{51} Girard, \textit{Scapegoat}, 178.
\textsuperscript{52} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 423. On this same page, he comments that the laws prohibiting the boiling of kids in milk are less important than the ones that speak and reveal the mimetic nature of humans. See also Girard, \textit{I See Satan}, 12.
\textsuperscript{53} All future biblical citations as well as citations from the apocryphal books will be taken from the NRSV.
covetousness. Furthermore, Girard argues that the previous four prohibitions—the ones outlawing murder, adultery, theft and bearing false witness—are subsumed under this final command. As a result, the law codes do participate in the biblical revelation of humanity’s problem: mimetic desire that crescendos in the victimization of innocent person. Thus, at least some of the Old Testament laws are “necessary warnings against behavior that heightens violence by awakening jealous rivalries and vendettas.”

In spite of such affirmations about the Old Testament law codes, Girard maintains several criticisms of them. For one, Girard thinks their current formulation actually exacerbates mimetic desire rather than abate it. He writes, “Their primarily negative character … inevitably provokes in us the mimetic urge to transgress them.” In other words, by prohibiting a particular action or object (“Thou shalt not …”), they serve to only elevate its desirability and the likelihood that others would crave it. Secondly, following the Apostle Paul’s negative judgment of the law, he concludes that, after the fullness of the revelation available in Christ, the law can only function “as veils and obstacles that obstruct the fullness of revelation.” In their contexts, the Old Testament laws were meant to progress the revelation of the human problem to the next level. However, since we are reading them after the fullness of the revelation in Christ, we should not privilege them as being of equal fullness as that which is available in Christ. To accord them equal weight with the revelation of Christ is to regress to a stage previously surpassed. To summarize, Girard affirms that there is positive revelation present in Exodus and the law codes

55 Girard’s elevation of the final commandment differs from the approach of others like Luther. Luther elevates the first command, arguing that living out faith in God will lead one to obey the remaining commandments. See Martin Luther, Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 31:353, 44:110-14.
56 Scott Cowdell, René Girard and Secular Modernity (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 89.
57 Girard, I See Satan, 14.
58 Girard, Things Hidden, 190-1.
but also qualifies his positive statements in light of his understanding of revelation’s progression in the biblical canon.

Girard seems to offer a similar assessment of Joshua and Judges, though they receive minimal treatment in his work. Based on his few brief statements, one could say that such books still possess a strong degree of the mythic tendency. For example, he makes the following comments about Judges: “In fact, in the Old Testament one still finds a good deal of violence: in Judges and other historical books, there is still a mythical valorization of the community against the scapegoat victim.”59 Thus, though Girard affirms that Exodus and conquest narratives proclaim the innocence of the victim, they have not pried themselves free from what he calls the “mythical” point of view.

1.B.4. Wisdom Literature

Like other Old Testament texts, Girard believes the wisdom literature possesses the same duality. While they do defend the victim against the crowds, they also promulgate a notion of God as angry and vengeful. In the book of Psalms, Girard finds the psalms of lament particularly striking and indicative of the biblical revelation in that they give a voice to the victims of ancient Israel. He writes, “As far as I know, these texts are the first in human history to allow those who would simply become silent victims in the world of myth to voice their complaint as hysterical crowds besiege them.”60 For example, the psalmist of Psalm 17 asks for God’s protection against unjust violence:

Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings, from the wicked who despoil me, my deadly enemies who surround me. They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly. They track me down; now

---

59 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 207.
60 Girard, I See Satan, 115-6; idem, Job, 8; and idem, “Bloody Skin,” 62.
they surround me; they set their eyes to cast me to the ground. They are like a lion eager to tear, like a young lion lurking in ambush (Psalm 17:9b-12).

In Psalms like this, the cries of the innocent are preserved in spite of the mob’s desire to extinguish it. What has been preserved is not the mythical condemnation of the victim, but his cry to YHWH. For this reason, Girard believes the Psalms make an important step forward in salvation history.

Still, the Psalms do not speak with all of one voice. While some side with the victim as noted above, others expect God to mete out judgment upon evildoers, which reifies a “mythical” perspective according to Girard. In fact, because of this, Girard once reminded one of his interviewers that the Psalmist is “not a Christian yet.” Psalm 137 is a prime example in this regard when it relishes the thought of future conquerors smashing the infants of Babylon against the rocks as recompense for their decimation of the Israelites (Psalm 137:8-9). In other Psalms, it is apparent that the innocent victim expects God to mete out justice and vengeance upon his or her attackers. Because of these elements, Girard, despite the milestone that is reached in the Psalms, still thinks they perpetuate a mythical point of view. However, this point of view seems to be gradually eroding because Girard concludes that “the cry for revenge is quite secondary.” As a result, the biblical revelation has not simply gained a foothold but is beginning to overcome the opposite point of view in the texts of the Psalms.

Girard also devoted an entire book to analyzing Job and came to similar conclusions as he discovers in other portions of the Old Testament, namely, that the book of Job possesses both pieces that share the biblical support of the victim and passages that buttress the victimary tendencies of humans and their corresponding views of God. Girard’s exegesis of Job

61 Girard particularly finds Psalm 73 an example of this tendency. See Girard, Job, 55-9, 122.
63 Ibid., 63.
emphasizes a strand of argumentation within the book that contains Job’s revolt against the indictment being forced upon him by his visiting friends. Here he notes that in spite of the theology being brandished against him, namely, that God is punishing him for his wrongdoing, Job still manages to affirm that God will come to his defense (Job 16:19-21; 19:25-7).

Admittedly, Job struggles to hold on to this insight in opposition to his friends’ point of view since they are persuasively trying to elicit an admission of guilt from him (Job 30:9-15).64 However, despite second guessing himself at points in the dialogues with his friends, Girard identifies Job’s assertion of innocence as the true message of the exchanges between Job and his friends. Consequently, if one affirms alongside of Job that he is innocent regarding the calamities that have struck him, then the calamities plaguing Job have no divine origin, but are solely the creation of his fellow humans.65 Hence, Girard concludes that Job is “the victim of his people,” who, as a result of the mimetic crisis plaguing his community, finds himself being forced to become a scapegoat for his people.66

Despite such a compelling interpretation that corroborates Girard’s understanding of biblical revelation, he does recognize that there is much in the book of Job that supports a view that God punishes the wicked and perhaps Job too. Moreover, the opening prologue (Job 1:1-2:10) seems to credit God with some degree of responsibility for Job’s calamities since he allows Satan to plague Job. Furthermore, the ending monologue by God brings Job to silence, attenuating his protests of innocence (Job 38:1-42:6). These portions of Job stand in conflict with Girard’s emphasis on God’s defense of Job. As a result, Girard asserts that the prologue and concluding speeches of God constitute the theology of the victimizers who are attempting to

---

64 Girard, Job, 125-6; cf. idem, Evolution and Conversion, 196-7; idem, I See Satan, 117. In the latter, he calls Job a “super-psalm.”
65 Girard, Job, 3-4.
66 This is the subtitle of Girard’s book on Job, Job: The Victim of his People.
suppress the insights expressed by Job himself.\textsuperscript{67} In the end, Girard concludes that the prologue and conclusion derive from a different author than the one who wrote the dialogues of Job. If Girard is right, the current form of Job is the record of a clash between the biblical revelation of the victim’s innocence and the attempts of mythical theology to smother it.\textsuperscript{68}

1.B.5. Prophetic Literature

For Girard, the zenith of Old Testament revelation is attained in the prophetic corpus, even if it still falls short of the revelation that will come in the Gospels.\textsuperscript{69} In the prophets, one finds the starkest repudiation of all sacrifice, human and animal.\textsuperscript{70} Girard writes, “… in the prophetic texts … animal sacrifices will not work any more…. In other words, the Bible provides not merely a replacement of the object to be sacrificed, but the end of the sacrificial order in its entirety…”\textsuperscript{71} The prophets, therefore, deconstruct the institution of sacrifice itself rather than simply trying to displace or suppress its harmful effects like earlier stages of salvation history. In addition, the prophets recalibrate Israel’s maintenance of the law codes. Instead of allowing their adherence to degenerate into a rigid form of legalism, the prophets emphasize the law’s ethical focus as its “raison d’etre, which is the maintenance of harmonious relationships

\textsuperscript{67} Girard, Job, 141-3. Brueggemann, in contrast, suggests that interpreters should let the tensions in the book stand and that we should treat the work holistically. See Walter Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, and Advocacy (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 489-91.

\textsuperscript{68} Girard’s interpretation of Job, however, has not been compelling to everyone. See Levine’s article that argues against Job being a human scapegoat: Baruch Levine, “René Girard on Job: the Question of the Scapegoat,” Semeia 33 (1985): 125-33.

\textsuperscript{69} Kirwan demarcates the prophets as the second phase of scriptural interpretation of the scapegoat mechanism. The final of three stages comes with the Gospels. See Michael Kirwan, Philosophy and Theology: Girard and Theology (London: Continuum, 2009), 84.

\textsuperscript{70} Girard, Things Hidden, 240. This view of the prophetic denouncement of sacrifice is debated, even by some who adopt pieces of Girard’s thought. See Robert J. Daly, Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 33-4.

\textsuperscript{71} Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 203; cf. idem, I See Satan, 119.
within the community.”

Thus, the prophets take the process of revelation to the next stage by revealing that God’s primary intention was the creation of a social order void of victimization.

For all the accolades that Girard confers on the prophetic texts, Girard still sees mythological accretions present. A closer look at his handling of the final Servant Song from Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) demonstrates the problematic nature of the prophets that Girard identifies, though it occurs less frequently than it does in other portions of the Old Testament.

Girard equates the marring and deformation of YHWH’s servant as a classic example of a mob lynching. Since the plight of the servant resembles the classic story of the innocent victim so well, Girard avers that ultimately God had nothing to do with the death: it was caused solely by humans. However, the author of the text, at least in Girard’s estimation, jeopardizes this reality by crediting God with the violence. Speaking of the servant, Isaiah 53:4 says, “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.” Thus, God is reintroduced as a cause of the violence when, according to Girard’s theory, God would have nothing to do with such violence. As a result, Girard concludes: “This ambiguity in the role of Yahweh corresponds to the general conception of the deity in the Old Testament. In the prophetic books, this conception tends to be increasingly divested of the violence characteristic of primitive deities…. Yet all the same, in the Old Testament we never arrive at a conception of the deity that is entirely foreign to violence.”

According to Girard, in Isaiah 53, the Old Testament comes closest to most fully revealing the

---

72 Girard, Things Hidden, 154. As Girard, notes, though, the prophets are simply carrying out the inherent implications found in the law itself rather than completely disparaging it (e.g. Lev. 19:18). Another important point Girard makes is: “In the prophetic books, we are no longer confronted with mythical or legendary accounts, but with exhortations, threats and forecasts of the future of the chosen people.” Cited from Girard, Things Hidden, 155.


74 Girard, Things Hidden, 157. “It was not God who smote him; God’s responsibility is implicitly denied.” Later, in the same book, he affirms that the elements, which attribute God with the death of the Servant, derive from “a later interpretation that falsifies the text.” Cited from Girard, Things Hidden, 227.

75 Ibid., 157.
scapegoat mechanism but falters at the finish line, so it will require another impartation of the biblical revelation, namely, Jesus Christ, to make this point unequivocally.

1.B.6. The Gospels

The Old Testament, though progressively unveiling the anthropological insights about human nature, never fully arrives at a complete, pristine revelation of the scapegoat mechanism and the innocence of the victims. It remains ambiguous by itself. Girard sees the Gospels, in particular the cross of Christ, as the hermeneutical key, which unlocks the intended revelation of the Old Testament. Jesus is “a clearer and more definite revelation” of sacrifice who thereby becomes the savior of “all human beings.” The Old Testament thus heralds and prefigures the revelation that is to come in Jesus and the Gospels.

1.B.6.a. Jesus’ Ministry

While the Old Testament never finishes the task of revealing the human penchant for scapegoats, Jesus’ ministry takes up the mantle and takes the trajectory of the Old Testament to its logical conclusion. Girard finds such implications present in the way that the Gospels apply Old Testament texts to Jesus. For instance, Second Isaiah has often been noted as containing

---

76 There is some tension here within Girard’s thought. In a desire to affirm continuity with the Old Testament, there is a concerted effort to see the Gospels as a fulfillment of the Old Testament itself and thus of one piece. If one posits too strong of a rupture, one risks reinstating a system of differentiation. However, Girard seems to jeopardize this at times when he describes the New Testament as constituting a “decisive break” from the Old Testament with its decisive vitiation of sacrifice. See Girard, Things Hidden, 200.

77 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 256. Here he writes, “God provided the text, but also the hermeneutical key with which to read it: the Cross. The two cannot be separated.” See also his conclusions about the book of Job: “As it has come down to us, the Book of Job does not insist enough on our hearing the complaint of Job: many things divert us from the crucial texts, deforming and neutralizing them with our secret complicity. We need, therefore, another text, something else, or rather someone else to come to our aid: the text of the Passion, Christ, is the one to help us understand Job, because Christ completes what Job only half achieves, and that is paradoxically what in the context of the world is his own disaster, the Passion that will soon be inscribed in the text of the Gospels.” Cited from Girard, Job, 163.

78 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 206.

79 Girard, Things Hidden, 205.
important prophetic hopes for the restoration of Israel, which will be more fully discussed in subsequent chapters. The opening verses of Second Isaiah look forward to God’s restoration of Israel: “A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain” (Isaiah 40:3-4).

Although most commentators take this as a reference to Cyrus’ edict that allowed the exiled Jews to return to their native soil, Girard departs from the academic guild at this point by using a figural interpretation. For him, the leveling of the terrain constitutes “the most tremendous figura of the sacrificial crisis, of the violent undifferentiation process.”

In other words, it is an allusion to the scapegoat mechanism’s erasure of difference in a community. When the Synoptic writers use this verse to introduce the ministry of Jesus in this way, they are indicating “that Jesus emerges at the cynosure of a crisis which calls for the designation of a new scapegoat, and this would be Jesus; this new scapegoating will be the occasion for God to reveal himself.” In this way, Girard situates Jesus and his ministry within the larger prophetic context, which is taken to be one anticipating another cataclysmic victimization.

In the Gospels, Jesus’ main message proclaims the advent of the kingdom of God. For Girard, Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom constitutes an invitation for the Jewish people to forsake the violent construction of culture and to embrace the peace offered in the kingdom of God. According to Girard, the Kingdom brings an unmediated relationship with God. Instead of relating to God through means of sacrifices, the relationship is now based upon the “rules of

---

81 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 210. It should be noted here that Girard sees John the Baptist quoting these verses about Jesus, which is not clear in all of the Gospels themselves. Matthew 3:1-3 could be read this way, but it is unclear whether the author is citing this about John or whether Matt. 3:3 is still the content of John’s speech. Luke 3:1-6 is ambiguous on the person citing Isaiah 40. Mark 1:1-3 is the most ambiguous of all being used by the author to introduce John the Baptist as well. In John 1:23, John cites Isaiah 40 as a reference to himself.
82 Girard, Things Hidden, 201-3.
the kingdom.” Moreover, the Kingdom of God brings social reconciliation apart from violence: “The Kingdom of God means the complete and definitive elimination of every form of vengeance and every form of reprisal in relations between men.” Thus, the Kingdom ushers in the cessation of violence altogether.

As the announcement of the Kingdom meets with refusal or dismissal by his various audiences in the Gospels, Jesus provides dire warnings—basically, the Apocalyptic sections of the Gospels—of how a failure to embrace the Kingdom will affect his listeners. For Girard, Jesus’ Apocalyptic teachings are not resorting to threats of divine vengeance for refusing the Kingdom but demonstrating a rather prescient understanding of human evil: refusing to relinquish human violence will result in bringing destruction upon oneself. In summary, violence delivers its own punishment. The Apocalypse is not a divine thunderbolt falling from heaven upon humans, but the inherent return of violence upon its perpetrator. As a result, Jesus offers his contemporaries two alternatives: embrace the Kingdom of God without violence or the Apocalyptic return of violence will be its own reward.

Not only does Jesus offer a kingdom of non-violence, but his teaching also exhibits an uncanny insight into the scapegoat mechanism. For example, in John 8:43-44, Jesus talks about the devil being a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and this is taken as evidence corroborating Girard’s supposition that humanity originated in a founding murder. According to Girard, designating Satan as a murderer from the beginning is an allusion to Cain’s murder of

---

83 Ibid., 183.
84 Ibid., 197.
85 Ibid., 203.
86 Ibid., 260. While the curses against the Pharisees have often been taken as indications of anti-Semitism in the Gospels by some critics, Girard sees them as pronouncing the reality that evil insidiously doubles back onto its doer. Instead of being an attack on Judaism, it is a warning more generally against the mimetic contagion that threatens to overtake humanity as a whole (Ibid., 158-67). The warnings that Stephen delivers in Acts are again an indication that perpetrating violence incurs one’s self-judgment (Ibid., 170-4).
87 Girard, Things Hidden, 161; idem, I See Satan, 85-94.
Abel. Such an allusion, according to Girard, acknowledges the foundation of human culture upon the murder of innocent victims, which is precisely what Cain does. Furthermore, the lie associated with the devil refers to the ultimate deception that surrounds the scapegoat mechanism and keeps humanity from acknowledging its reality.

Additionally, Jesus’ teaching contains several allusions to Satan as the adversary or opponent. In interpreting the passages about Satan, Girard demythologizes Satan in such a way as to equate him and his persona with the mimetic desire that results in communal conflict. In fact, “Satan” denotes the entire mimetic process from the solicitation of initial desire to the hostile opposition generated between rivals and its consequent elimination of the victim. In one particular discourse in the Gospels, Jesus rhetorically asks about the manner in which Satan casts out Satan (Mark 3:23). In the conversation, Jesus verbalizes another insight into the mechanism by recognizing that Satan works by casting out Satan. According to Girard, when the social conflagration reaches the pinnacle moment at which it finds release, it does so at the expense of the victim. With each new victim a new form of social “order” is constructed. As such, the former evil is cast out but only by introducing a new form of victimary culture, hence establishing Satan once again.

---


89 Girard, I See Satan, 32-46. On page 33 he cites Matt. 16:23 in the following manner: “Get behind me, Satan, for you are a scandal to me.” This equates Satan with scandal, which Girard interprets as referring to the mimetic process. In the context, it is unclear whether “you” refers to Peter or to Satan, and since the statement is directed at Peter, the former seems more likely. Another example of Girard’s demythologization of demons can be seen in his provocative exegesis of the Gerasene demonic, which, instead of being possession by a supernatural being, is taken as a collective possession by mimeticism. See Girard, Scapegoat, 165-83.

90 Girard, I See Satan, 43. He writes, “The Devil, or Satan, signifies rivalistic contagion, up to and including the single victim mechanism.”

91 Again, Girard’s exegesis here is a bit troubling. Jesus embarks on this discourse not to talk about Satan per se, but to disprove the claims of his detractors, who are claiming that he is possessed by Beelzebul. He explains in another work that Jesus is here quoting the logic and beliefs of his interlocutors. See Girard, Scapegoat, 186.

92 Girard, I See Satan, 34-5.
Other additional passages in the Gospel are taken as supporting Girard’s conclusions. For example, there are themes of unjustified violent lynching as in the parable of the wicked tenants and Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 118:22: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” Moreover, Girard finds further examples in the curses against the Pharisees that deride them for being “like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth” (Matt. 23:27). For Girard, the reference to tombs can be connected to funeral rites, which, in his view, ultimately derive from the scapegoat mechanism. Thus, the allusion to tombs reminds Jesus’ listeners that human culture is founded upon the graves of past innocent victims.

In *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, Girard identifies Jesus’ warnings about coming scandals as warnings about scapegoat mechanisms (e.g. Matt 18:6-9). For Girard, the warning against scandals refers most directly to:

… the behavior of mimetic rivals who, as they mutually prevent each other from appropriating the object they covet, reinforce more and more their double desire, their desire for both the other’s object of the desire and for the desire of the other. Each consistently takes the opposite view of the other in order to escape their inexorable rivalry, but they always return to collide with the fascinating obstacle that each one has come to be for the other.

In short, Jesus’ warnings about scandals are informing his audience about the nature of mimetic rivalry and its proliferation within a community.

Finally, and most importantly, Girard sees Jesus continuing the prophetic rejection of sacrifice. Citing Matthew 9:13 where Jesus quotes from Hosea 6:6, saying, “Go and learn what

---

93 Jesus cites Psalm 118 in Matt. 21:42, Mark 12:10-11, and Luke 20:17. Girard, “The Evangelical Subversion of Myth,” 37. I will point out that Girard fails to cite Psalm 118:23 (“This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes”), which suggests divine involvement in the rejection of the cornerstone. The passages in Matthew and Mark both include Psalm 118:23; it is only absent in Luke.


97 Even the disciples are not exempt. See Girard, *Scapegoat*, 158.
this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’” Girard sees Jesus corroborating the prophetic critique of sacrifice, which is not simply a critique of impure motives in the sacrificial act but the sacrificial enterprise itself.98 In fact, when Girard ventures into a theological exploration of what it means for Jesus to be the incarnate Word of God, he equates the Word with the prophetic oracle: “I wish for mercy and not sacrifices.”99 Thus, the various emphases in Jesus’ ministry—the kingdom of God, his awareness of the scapegoat mechanism along with its generation of human culture, and the rejection of sacrifice—all combine to provide Girard grounds for concluding that Jesus sought to reveal the mimetic nature of humanity in his ministry and to rescind the ideology supporting sacrifice.

1.B.6.b The Passion of Christ

Although Jesus operates with an intelligent awareness of the scapegoat mechanism, it is not until the death and resurrection of Christ that sacrifice itself is finally deconstructed. For Girard, the events precipitating the crucifixion of Jesus correspond precisely to the snowballing of mimetic rivalry that has consumed a host of human victims throughout history. Girard finds confirmation of this correlation littered throughout the portrayal of the Passion. First, Jesus’ persecutors articulate a rather explicit belief in the efficaciousness of the scapegoat mechanism. In the Gospel of John, the religious leaders conclude: “…it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (John 11:50). For Girard, this is further confirmation that the sacrificial logic has been deeply ingrained in Jesus’ antagonists who will

98 Girard, Things Hidden, 180.
99 Ibid., 210. Elsewhere he affirms that this is the incarnation of the nonviolence of that Father: “If the Father is as the Son describes him, the Word of the Son … is indeed the Word of the Father…. The Word of the Father, which is identical with the Father, consists in telling mankind what the Father is, so that people may be able to imitate him: ‘Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors; so shall you be sons of your Father’” (Ibid., 269).
eventually seal his fate on the cross.100 Second, the entire social structure turns upon Jesus. Together, the religious and political leaders consent to his death, being pulled into the conflagration by the violence of the mob and their own desire to maintain power.101 What is more, the disciples also seem to acquiesce in this moment. By failing to stand by him, they give “their explicit or implicit assent to his death….“102 Thus, Jesus dies abandoned by all, just like the solitary victim, which generated human culture. Third, Girard also identifies places in the Gospels where the community experiences the reconciliatory effects of aligning against a common foe. Here he points to Luke 23:12 where it says, “That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.”103 Thus, the common alliance against Jesus brings two political leaders together in friendship, just like the victims of the past. By combining these various elements together, Girard concludes that Jesus’ crucifixion bears the structural similarities typical of the scapegoat mechanism.

Although the events leading up to Jesus’ death correspond precisely to the stages of the mimetic contagion, Girard observes that the Gospels continue the biblical defense of the victim by affirming Jesus’ innocence. Girard’s quintessential observation is that, despite the array of people aligned against Jesus, he is never presented as guilty or worthy of such opprobrium as myths would depict the victim of the crowd. He writes, “In fact the opposite is the case: the Passion is presented as a blatant piece of injustice. Far from taking the collective violence upon itself, the text places it squarely on those who are responsible.”104 The Gospels place responsibility on the perpetrators in various ways. The clearest expression of Jesus’ innocence is

100 Girard, Scapegoat, 112-4.
101 Ibid., 105-6.
102 Girard, Things Hidden, 167. He corroborates the point in another work The Scapegoat: “The fact that even the disciples cannot resist the effect of the scapegoat reveals the power exerted by the persecutors’ account over man” (105).
103 Girard, I See Satan, 132-3.
104 Girard, Things Hidden, 168.
Christ’s declaration in John 15:25 that “They hated me without a cause,” which affirms the vacuous rationality behind the mob’s lynching of Jesus. Like other victims throughout human culture, the charges against Jesus were ad hoc constructions that had little purchase on reality. This is not to forget that the persecutors think they are doing justice. The main point, for Girard, is the contrast made by Jesus and the Gospel narrators to the effect that the persecutors’ assiduous allegiance to their notions of “justice” is actually injustice at its worst. The Gospels also capture Jesus’ innocence in other ways. For example, the Gospel of John refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God, which emphasizes “the innocence of this victim, the injustice of the condemnation, and the causelessness of the hatred of which it is the object.” Moreover, Jesus’ constant comparison with the prophets—i.e. the scapegoats of the Old Testament—shows Jesus receives the same unjust persecution. Therefore, although Jesus is portrayed as a victim of the mimetic contagion, the Gospel writers never bow to the pressure to believe Jesus deserved his fate.

1.B.6.c. The Resurrection of Christ

It would be a mistake to say that Jesus being the innocent victim on the cross is the only thing necessary to attain human salvation in Girard’s soteriology, for the resurrection also plays an essential role. Girard notes that the Old Testament narratives of collective violence only include two of the three stages of mimetic theory: the initial mimetic crisis and collective violence. The final stage, however, the one in which “the resurrection … reveals the divinity of

---

105 Girard, *I See Satan*, 127-8. Moreover, this is a citation from Psalm 35:19, which indicates that Jesus is suffering violence similar to what was faced by the persecuted voices of the Psalms. Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 210; idem, *Scapegoat*, 102-4.


107 Ibid. Interestingly, here he takes the sign of Jonah as a reference, not to three days or to resurrection, but as a reference to Jonah’s victimization by the sailors. Girard, also sees Jesus as mirroring Isaiah 53, which also describes the fate of a solitary victim, making Isaiah 53 a proto-evangelium in the Old Testament. See René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996), 274.
the victim” is absent because the victims are never apotheosized in the Old Testament. However, the Gospels brazenly introduce this final element, placing the Gospels in a direct correspondence to myths in all three stages. For Girard, this correspondence does not jeopardize the veracity of the accounts but serves to bring the revelation to its culmination.

In fact, the resurrection is the moment at which the tide that has engulfed Jesus, demanding his death, begins to abate. The resurrection illumines the disciples who have been swept up in the pogrom against Jesus. It is only after the resurrection that the disciples break from their solidarity with the mob and become witnesses to the innocence of Jesus. Moreover, the resurrection is not simply a revelation about Jesus’ innocence, but it also constitutes the final revelation of humanity. It is the resurrection, in conjunction with the collective victimization of Jesus that reveals what human culture has always sought to cover up, namely, the manner in which its own violence has generated deities. By revealing this fact more lucidly than any other event, the resurrection “opposes so decisively the power of the mythic cover-up that once we perceive this opposition, the thematic resemblances between myth and Gospel fade into insignificance by comparison.” Thus, it brings all the edifices that have supported humankind, including archaic religion and its derivatives, crumbling to the ground.

Due to his comparison with mythology, Girard must defend the veracity of the resurrection accounts from the charge of being another mythic story of a dying and rising god. Much of his defense lies in the uniqueness of Jesus’ resurrection in contrast to myths. The chief difference lies in “the power of revelation” found in Jesus’ death and resurrection by which he

108 Girard, I See Satan, 106-7; cf. 121.
110 Girard, “Are the Gospels Mythical?” 31. He writes, “Only the Resurrection, because it enlightens the disciples, reveals completely the things hidden since the foundation of the world, which are the same thing as the secret of Satan, never disclosed since the origin of human culture: the founding murder and the origin of human culture.” Still, Girard is rather ambiguous as to what kind of information is imparted in the resurrection and how his anthropology is linked with the re-appearance of the Christ.
111 Girard, I See Satan, 135.
insinuates that it alone is capable of revealing the violent origins of human culture.\textsuperscript{112} From the unparalleled “power of revelation” found in the Gospel accounts, Girard makes two conclusions. First, this revelation cannot derive from humans who have been mired in the lies and mythology of victims made sacred. It can only come from the divine realm. The fact that only God can exist above the mimetic fray serves to support the affirmation of Jesus’ divinity.\textsuperscript{113} Moreover, Jesus is declared divine before the collective victimization occurs and not as a result of it.\textsuperscript{114} Second, because the Gospels never succumb to the invectives of Jesus’ persecutors and assiduously hold to the truth of his innocence, one is warranted in assuming that their proclamation of the resurrection is true as well. Christ’s resurrection is the resurrection of an innocent victim at the hands of God, not one that is mythically generated by human violence.\textsuperscript{115} Moreover, the Gospels depart from the myths in the fact that the mob never proclaims Jesus as divine but only a small group of disciples, a minority that has managed to break away from the mob.\textsuperscript{116} Girard’s chief defense of the resurrection again derives from the fact that, though the Gospels might mirror other examples of a dying and rising god, a closer comparison reveals many significant differences that support the veracity of the Gospel accounts.

For additional support, Girard notes that the Gospel writers openly mention a supposed resurrection that they believe to be false. He points to the fact that Matthew and Mark both contain Herod’s comment betraying his personal belief that John the Baptist had been resurrected

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{113} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 218-9; cf. idem, \textit{I See Satan}, 131.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{114} Girard, \textit{Battling to the End}, 104.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{115} Girard, \textit{I See Satan}, 135. He describes the resurrection of Jesus being different on this point because “the resurrection of Christ owes nothing to human violence, by contrast to mythic resurrections, which really stem from collective murders. The resurrection of Christ comes about after his death, inevitably but not immediately; it happens only on the third day, and if we look through a Christian lens, it has its origin in God himself.”}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 123.}
\end{footnotes}
He argues that if the Gospel writers were conniving propagandists, they would have never allowed the threat of another person being resurrected to stand in contest with the resurrection of Christ. The Gospel writers, however, were secure in their affirmation of the resurrection to the point that they were willing to let the true and the false resurrection stand side by side. Moreover, they allow themselves this luxury because the false resurrection, that of John the Baptist, once again reveals the usual way in which humans create deities: John the Baptist was murdered like a collective victim under Herod. It is little wonder that Herod feared him coming back from the dead as a malevolent deity.

1.B.6.d. Salvation

At this point, salvation history has arrived at an essential destination. The death and resurrection of Christ procure salvation for humankind by emancipating humans from the cultural edifices of the scapegoat mechanism. Once the scapegoat mechanism has been exposed, as it has been in the death and resurrection of Jesus, it loses its power to conceal and re-mythologize victims. Girard describes it in the following manner: “Once understood, the mechanisms can no longer operate; we believe less and less in the culpability of the victims they demand. Deprived of the food that sustains them, the institutions deprived from these

---

117 Girard, _Girard Reader_, 263. “Now there is a form of divinization reported in the Gospels, which is magical and mythical, for instance Herod Antipas’s belief in the resurrection of John the Baptist, and the divinization of Christ, which is just the opposite. The Gospels are so close to myth in a way, and yet they are poles apart.”

118 Girard, _I See Satan_, 133-6.

119 While Girard has advanced some compelling arguments in favor of the resurrection, one could hope for more. Girard makes the validity of the resurrection depend upon his interpretation of the Gospels. If the Gospels do happen to portray Jesus as performing some kind of expiatory role, then his argument for the resurrection based upon the Gospel’s difference from myth will be severely undermined. Furthermore, one could ask Girard whether the divinity of Christ affirmed in the Gospels has simply been captured in the middle of the mythologizing process as he understands it.
mechanisms collapse one after the other about us.”\textsuperscript{120} As a result of the revelation found in the Gospels, human culture has now been liberated from its own self-inflicted imprisonment. It no longer needs to continue scapegoating innocent victims to procure its own survival.

Although the revelation is primarily about the nature of humanity, the Gospels do reveal something of God according to Girard. For one, it demonstrates to humans “that God himself accepts the role of the victim of the crowd so that he can save us all.”\textsuperscript{121} This is a direct contrast to the mythic gods that threaten to annihilate disobedient followers. Instead of encouraging more victims, God in fact becomes a victim. In light of this, the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ disabuses humankind, through his victimhood, “of the illusion of a violent God, which must be abolished in favour of Christ’s knowledge of his Father.”\textsuperscript{122} God is thus a God of nonviolence.

1.C. Conclusion

Girard’s soteriology, which rests upon the three main theses of mimetic desire, the scapegoat mechanism, and the revelation of this very process in Jesus Christ, can find corresponding biblical texts for support. For Girard, salvation history is the progressive revelation of the nature of mimetic desire and its corresponding demand for innocent victims to sustain human culture. The substitution of animal sacrifices for humans in the patriarchal narratives is an important step forward in this regard. The law codes again attempt to suppress and contain mimetic desire and rivalry within the community. The Psalms come to the defense of the innocent victims and record their plaintive cries, even as they yearn for divine recompense against their enemies. With the prophets, there is a noticeable step forward as the institution of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 101.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Girard, \textit{I See Satan}, 130.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Girard, \textit{Evolution and Conversion}, 216.
\end{itemize}
sacrifice is rejected entirely. However, the Old Testament contains an ambiguous view of God for Girard and thus it never arrives at the fullness of revelation. Only with the Gospels, which contain the death and resurrection of Jesus, where God becomes a victim of his people to emancipate them from the practice of scapegoating has the revelation arrived in toto.

Although Girard weaves a compelling narrative of salvation history and finds passages that suggest the biblical texts are aware of mimetic desire and the human tendency to scapegoat, Girard has avoided some of the texts in the Gospels that are problematic for his case, which will be analyzed in later chapters. In the next chapter, we turn to the manner in which Girard’s hypotheses have been received by those operating more specifically within the discipline of theology. As we will see, several scholars and theologians have adopted Girard’s theories and made important adaptations, though others have remained more critical. As we analyze those who have made some version of Girardian soteriology their own, we will pay close attention to the manner in which they handle the problematic passages in the Gospels when applicable.
CHAPTER 2: READING THE BIBLE WITH THE GIRARDIANS

René Girard’s thought has received varied responses. Many have found Girard’s work compelling and have taken up the basic elements of Girard’s theories, adding particular nuances and developments to Girard’s fundamental insights. Although some theologians and scholars have embraced Girardian soteriology wholly, others have offered cautious and sometimes strident critiques of his work. In light of this divergent reception, Girard remains a controversial figure, heralded by some and questioned by others. In what follows, I elucidate some of the ways in which Girard’s soteriology and exegesis of the Gospels has been both adopted and critiqued by various authors, particularly noting interaction with the Last Supper sayings when such is present in the author’s work.

Since Girard’s interdisciplinary approach spans several different disciplines, even within theological studies, this particular chapter has divided Girard’s interlocutors into two categories. The first includes those who engage Girard’s exegesis of the Gospels and the Bible, that is, those working primarily as biblical theologians. The second group focuses primarily on the theological implications of Girard’s thought. While these authors are not devoid of biblical elements, their approach is more theological than exegetical in nature. After tracing out the ways in which people have approved of or critiqued Girard, this chapter concludes with a section regarding the need and viability of this particular study, which seeks to read the Last Supper
sayings within the milieu of Second Temple Judaism and evaluate whether Girard’s affirmations that the Gospels are non-sacrificial can be maintained.\(^{123}\)

2.A. **Biblical Theology: Girardian Exegesis of Scripture**

2.A.1. *Raymund Schwager*

Raymund Schwager was among the first to corroborate Girard’s biblical anthropology and soteriology across a broader swath of biblical texts than what Girard himself used.\(^{124}\)

Written as an evaluation and development of Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred*, Schwager’s *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?* still constitutes one of the most sweeping attempts at reading the Christian Bible from a Girardian perspective wherein the biblical God is completely disassociated with violence.\(^{125}\) Schwager’s analysis of the Old Testament reveals that, for the great majority of the time, much of the violence that is credited to God simply comprises humans perpetrating violence against one another when the fuller context is taken into account.\(^{126}\) At the same time, Schwager does not deny the presence of some texts, ostensibly few in his analysis, that attribute violence directly to the hand of YHWH, which leads him to the conclusion that YHWH’s relationship to violence is ambiguous in the Old Testament.\(^{127}\) Appropriating a manner of Old Testament exegesis akin to the early church fathers, Schwager suggests that the

\(^{123}\) See, for example, Girard, *Things Hidden*, 180. Some follow Girard here without reserve. E.g. Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Desire, Gift, and Recognition: Christology and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 260. Henriksen readily affirms that Girard is right in this assertion: “Girard claims that there is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice, whatever definition (expiation, substitution, etc.) we may give for that sacrifice. He is right in this, insofar as the Gospels are concerned.”


\(^{126}\) Schwager, *Scapegoats*, 55-70. These observations influence the direction in which he interprets the apocalyptic and judgment pronouncements by Jesus in his later work. See, for example, Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, trans. James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 159. This was originally published as *Jesus in Heilsdrama: Entwurf einer biblischen Erlösungslehre* (Innsbruck, Austria: Tyrolia, 1990).

true nature of the Old Testament can only be read in light of the New Testament, which posits Jesus as the center of God’s saving action for humanity and the hermeneutical key for unlocking the biblical texts.

In his approach to interpreting the New Testament, Schwager uses a particular set of texts to guide his reading of the New Testament. Following Girard quite closely, he finds in the summary to the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18) the hermeneutical key to the New Testament: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Mark 12:10). As he points out, this citation from Psalm 118:22 finds itself repeated across several sectors of the New Testament, ranging from the Gospels to Acts, 1 Peter, and some allusions in Paul. The violent rejection of Jesus—rather than his substitutionary or expiatory death on behalf of others—comprises the key to understanding the cross, and Schwager avers that this theme is “a summation of the contents of the primitive Christian kerygma.”

Christ, the rejected one, thus maps onto Girard’s portrayal of Jesus as the innocent scapegoat who is rejected by the community. At this point, Schwager proceeds in reading New Testament soteriology along Girardian lines: Jesus’ innocence reveals the sinfulness of humanity and their pent up anger directed at God.

While it is clear that Schwager’s soteriology is rooted in the fertile soil of Girard’s exegesis, Schwager does advance a soteriology more nuanced than what one finds in Girard. While Girard seems to avoid the biblical passages that describes Jesus’ death as “necessary” (e.g. Luke 24:26), Schwager contends that the cross was necessary on two accounts. First, Schwager

---

128 This intrabiblical quotation of Psalm 118:22 is placed in a similar location in Luke 20:17 and Matthew 21:42. Schwager makes use of this verse as a hermeneutical key in other works as well. See also Schwager, Jesus in the Drama, 140.
130 Schwager, Scapegoats, 145.
131 Ibid., 214.
sees the incarnation as necessarily culminating in the cross. Unlike Girard, Schwager’s notion of sin sees God, rather than the human other, as the ultimate rival. In fact, he sees this animosity toward God underlying all human scapegoating, which he believes is ultimately—though indirectly and unconsciously—targeted at God.132 Thus, when Christ claims to be God, the suppressed human vitriol against the divine is unleashed upon him with fury. As a result, the cross was not the arbitrary selection of a victim, but the colluding hatred of humankind against the divine directed at the one who claimed to be God. Second, the cross was necessary in order to reveal the goodness of God. Situated in the larger context of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God, which was met with firm denial by his contemporaries, the only way the light of the kingdom could cast out the darkness was to make the ultimate demonstration of love and forgiveness. For Schwager, human recalcitrance against Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom had become obstinate to the point that only the experience of forgiveness in response to the lynching of the Son could pierce the darkness.133 The cross, therefore, manifests God’s unceasing love, which does not return evil for evil, but instead responds with forgiveness and acceptance of sinners. In making the cross more about the revelation of God’s goodness and forgiveness, Schwager differs from Girard. Whereas the emphasis in Girard’s soteriology seems to fall upon revealing and emancipating humans from their sinful patterns, Schwager subordinates the exhibition of humanity’s sin to the larger objective of seeing the Christ event as the revelation of

132 Ibid., 190-200.
133 Raymund Schwager, “Christ’s Death and the Prophetic Critique of Sacrifice,” Semeia 33 (1985): 120. “It was not because divine justice unconditionally demanded a sacrifice of atonement that Christ’s death on the cross was necessary. For the salvation of men and women however it was unavoidable, because the message of incomprehensible goodness had foundered on hardened hearts, and because love which is not accepted cannot bring its healing and saving power into effect.” See also Raymund Schwager, Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation, trans. James Williams (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2006), 60-3. Despite such clear affirmations of the “necessity” of Christ’s death, Milbank, quite erroneously, claims that in Schwager’s soteriology, “Jesus’s death was in no sense necessary, but only occurred contingently, because of the rejection of God’s offering, through Jesus, of the message of the Kingdom.” John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 399. Though we will have reason to question Schwager’s account of “necessity” in the Gospels, Milbank certainly overstates the case.
God’s forgiveness and goodness. As such, the cross is not simply the revelation and negation of human sin, but the revelation of God’s positive and welcoming response to human depravity.

Schwager’s exegesis of the Last Supper sayings is woven into the fabric of his broader soteriology. Although some scholars question whether the sayings derive from Jesus, Schwager affirms that they originate with Jesus himself and that they do in fact offer readers an indication of how Jesus thought about his imminent death.134 Once making this conclusion, he argues that these sayings must be interpreted in line with Jesus’ kingdom proclamation, which never made forgiveness contingent upon the satisfaction of God’s justice.135 As a result, Schwager’s understanding of the kingdom limits what kind of soteriological implications can be derived from the Last Supper sayings because they must corroborate his understanding of the kingdom.136 For him, the Last Supper sayings are to be read as a prediction of how Jesus’ death would be the way in which “the goodness of his Father can reach human hearts….“137 Because the Jewish people had rejected the kingdom up to that point, Jesus’ death would penetrate such obstinacy with a nonviolent demonstration of God’s love, which would overwhelm the hardened hearts opposing the kingdom.

Although Schwager has a lengthy treatment of the Last Supper sayings, the intertextual elements seem underdeveloped. He downplays the obvious connections with the sacrifice and covenant inauguration on Sinai that will be discussed later in order to affirm that the Last Supper sayings corroborate Girard’s assertion that sacrificial theology is absent from the Gospels. While he suppresses the connection with Sinai, he does argue that there is a strong connection with

134 Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 101-3, 150.
135 For him, it seems that one is forced into an either-or situation. One is forced to see Jesus’ soteriology solely as the coming kingdom or solely as an expiatory death. See Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 111.
136 In fact, Schwager notes that the manner in which someone interprets the Last Supper sayings depends upon his or her presupposition about an image of God who enforces justice in the world. See Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama*, 101.
137 Ibid., 111.
Isaiah 53 that emerges in the Last Supper sayings, which seems to be more tenuous and is certainly not as overt as the connections with Sinai.\textsuperscript{138} For him, the connection with Isaiah 53 revolves around the similar vicarious, nonviolent offerings that both Jesus and the servant make. Jesus willingly offers himself up for the purposes of demonstrating to all that God responds to human violence with love and forgiveness. What he does on the cross in turn defines the nature of the kingdom as one of forgiveness and nonviolence.

In Schwager’s soteriology, the cross does not stand alone, but the resurrection provides further affirmation that God, even after the death of his own Son, offers a kingdom of pure forgiveness to all.\textsuperscript{139} Basically, it is a tangible corroboration of the truth of Jesus’ message, which once again shows humanity that God operates differently than they expect. When it comes to defending the veracity of the resurrection accounts, Schwager appeals to Girard himself, saying that the biblical accounts are more realistic than myths in that they follow the expulsion of the victim from the victim’s point of view.\textsuperscript{140} His response to the history of religions questions concerning the similarity of the Christian kerygma with other religions that proclaim the death and resurrection of a god is simply to say that they have not arrived at any solid solution regarding the origin of the accounts. One can question Schwager’s dependence upon Girard at this point. Simply arguing that the biblical accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ appear more realistic because Christ fails to fit the normal pattern of scapegoat narratives does not explain why the resurrection accounts are not later Christian


\textsuperscript{139} Schwager, Jesus in the Drama, 135-6. While Schwager takes the resurrection as a demonstration of forgiveness for all sinners, he perhaps oversteps its implications. As they have come down to us, the resurrection appearances were only experienced by the followers of Jesus who had defected in the moment of crisis. They were not, however, experienced by those who executed Jesus as a criminal. This important observation calls for caution before assuming that the resurrection results in forgiveness for all of the perpetrators of the violence against Christ as Schwager purports.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 127-30.
attempts to divinize the scapegoat victim as Girard’s understanding of archaic religion would predict.  

Although Schwager’s work is monumental in its scope, one can still question his final conclusion about the biblical texts being non-sacrificial in character. His reading of the Old Testament is ultimately dependent upon his reading of the New Testament, which is further contingent upon the selection of texts he makes paradigmatic for the New Testament. Thus, his choice of a hermeneutical lens—Jesus as the rejected cornerstone—for the New Testament has become the rudder that steers the ship of his reading of the biblical texts more broadly. While Schwager is able to demonstrate the existence of the rejected cornerstone motif across a wide swath of New Testament texts, his claim for this being the hermeneutical key is taken up with little defense other than its widespread presence. He is, at this point, open to the criticism that he has uncritically adopted Girard’s hermeneutical approach. Certainly other portraits of Christ’s death are just as widespread, and Jesus as inaugurating the new covenant seems just as, if not more, prevalent than the description of his death as the rejected cornerstone. What is more, covenantal imagery pervades not simply the New Testament but the Old Testament as well and could serve as a more encompassing soteriological motif.

---

141 This is not to say that they are, but simply that one could hope for more substantive reasons to follow Schwager and Girard on this point. More persuasive reasons can be found in other resources like N.T. Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).
Additionally, Schwager’s efforts at portraying God as offering pure forgiveness is undermined in his treatment of judgment.\textsuperscript{145} Schwager’s theology of judgment, drawn from his observation that humans perpetrate much of the violence ascribed to God in the Bible, sees many of the warnings about judgment as simply informing us about the natural consequences of evil. He affirms along Pauline-like lines, that sin and violence inherently revert back upon the perpetrator.\textsuperscript{146} At first, such affirmations seem to remove God from being the direct cause of violence.\textsuperscript{147} However, Schwager still constructs a notion of natural judgment that posits God as its source when this notion of “self judgment” is described as a result of what God “inscribed in nature.”\textsuperscript{148} By affirming that God constructed nature in such a way as to reward sin with further evil and human violence, Schwager does not succeed in removing God from the causal chain of violence at all, but simply introduces a string of intermediaries causes. Perhaps the introduction of other causal agents like humans and nature lessens the direct role God plays, making the judgment language of Scripture more palatable to some, but it does not remove God from the equation altogether.

Schwager also does not repudiate a notion of future punishment in Hell, making it a real possibility for consistent refusal of God. People who reject the offer of the kingdom’s forgiveness “condemn themselves to ultimate isolation and to hell.”\textsuperscript{149} Jesus, therefore, “had to speak of hell as the last imminent consequence of humans being closed up within themselves.”\textsuperscript{150} Though Schwager uses the language of self-condemnation, his resuscitation of eschatological

\textsuperscript{145} Although Schwager suggests that Jesus’ mission championed a unique view of God as nonviolent, which clashed with the views of his contemporaries, Schwager still thinks that the view of God as “an alien and hostile power” is in some sense beneficial in order to move people toward a conversion toward Christ. This seems contradictory to his overall notion that soteriology is largely about embracing the love and forgiveness of God displayed in Christ. See Schwager, \textit{Jesus in the Drama}, 196.
\textsuperscript{146} Schwager, \textit{Banished from Eden}, 61.
\textsuperscript{147} Schwager, \textit{Scapegoats}, 66.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{149} Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 113.
\textsuperscript{150} Schwager, \textit{Banished from Eden}, 85
punishment as “isolation” means that not all are welcomed into the eschaton. God’s eschatological future will exclude some. Though this is in keeping with traditional Christianity, for many Girardians, the threat of eschatological punishment reifies the notion of a violent deity who threatens to punish and exclude unless certain conditions are met. Thus, although Schwager assiduously tries to free God from the violence attributed to him in Scripture, Schwager seems forced to credit God with certain aspects of violence displayed in judgment, which can be either the natural effects of sin or the eschatological effects of repudiating God altogether.

Finally, Schwager leaves one aspect of human salvation, the forgiveness of willful sin, unhelpfully ambiguous.151 On the cross, Schwager sees Christ dying in solidarity with all victims: “Jesus on the cross identified himself as victim with all the others as victims.”152 On the one hand, Schwager sees all humanity suffering as some kind of victim, and, as a result, Christ’s cross is identified with their suffering qua victim. On the other hand, Schwager sees all humans as victimizers too.153 The nebulous aspect of his soteriology is how humans, as the victimizers (which is equally true of all people according to some of his assertions), are excused from such sin.154 He complicates the issue further by pitting God against any form of victimization in order to maintain that Jesus does not approve of his executioners’ actions. He writes that Jesus “will have nothing to do with the evil-doers as evildoers….“155 If Jesus stands opposed to the aspects of humans that are complicit in evil, what redemption is there when humans act in the role of victimizer rather than the role of victim? Unfortunately there is no clear answer to my knowledge in his work.

---

152 Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 118.
153 Schwager, Jesus in the Drama, 193.
154 His qualification, repeated in several different works, is that Jesus “identifies himself with his enemies insofar as they themselves are victims of evil….” While he operates with the assumption that humans are a mixture of victim and victimizer, it is not clear what Jesus specifically does to redeem our victimizing tendencies. At most, he sees Jesus as interceding for those who are victimizers. Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 121.
155 Ibid., 118; cf. 121.
His explanation of Jesus’ warnings of judgment also fails to identify what God does with willful victimizers. When it comes to Jesus’ identification of the just and the unjust at the final judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), Schwager furtively sidesteps the category of willful sin (i.e. victimization) altogether. When he identifies the two parties that Christ demarcates in the final judgment, “the just” are those who have “the justice of Christ … directly mirrored in their good works.” However, instead of calling the other party at the judgment the “unjust,” he calls them “the rejected,” and they are the ones who “are victims of sin.” By taking the two groups who are welcomed into Christ’s eternal bliss as those who do the works of Christ and those who suffer the violence of others, Schwager fails to explain how salvation is possible for violent perpetrators—which he avows is true of every human. While he seems to suggest at one point that Jesus might see evil tendencies as a result of being victimized by sin, this does not explain how consciously chosen human violence is forgiven or redeemed. If God truly does offer salvation for all aspects of humanity, then it needs to be clear how God deals with willful violence.

In spite of Schwager’s impressive work, there are reasons for criticism. If the goal of Girardian thought is, at least as some suggest, to remove the pieces that credit God with some form of violence, Schwager has not entirely achieved it, nor is it clear how willful perpetrators can be redeemed in his system. Most importantly, one has some reason to question whether he can claim the biblical texts in support of Girard as readily as he does. As we will see, his

---

156 Schwager, Jesus in the Drama, 196.
157 Ibid., 196. One can also question Schwager’s exegesis on this point. The parable in Matthew suggests the “rejected” are those handed over to eternal punishment, not the victims of other people’s sins.
158 Ibid., 194. He writes, “The event of the cross shows that individual people are far more victims of evil than responsible agents, for even those who condemned, handed over, and crucified the Son of God did not know what they were doing……” Even here, it seems he is talking about the degree of victimization, which still does not eliminate the fact that we as humans are perpetrators of violence as well as victims of it. The one place where he potentially sidesteps this problem is that Jesus, the judge over “the just” and “the rejected” sides with the rejected. But he then clarifies that the “rejected” are not the unjust perpetrators of violence but the “victims of sin” (Ibid., 196). Cf. Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 119.
treatment of the Last Supper sayings can be deemed perfunctory, failing to identify the sacrificial allusions and atonement theology present in them.

2.A.2. *James Williams*

Like Schwager, James Williams has also attempted a more holistic reading of the Bible from a Girardian perspective. He ventures onto a wider scale analysis of sibling rivalry within the Old Testament, specifically within the book of Genesis, noting the many instances of mimetic rivalry between the various sets of brothers in the book. Important in this regard is his observation that, in Genesis, the older brothers are not simply supplanted but are often “redeemed or ‘won back’ for the larger story” as in the case of Esau and Joseph’s older brothers.\(^\text{159}\) In addition, an elucidating comparison between certain Old Testament accounts and later Hellenistic Egyptian retellings of the stories informs his reading of some Old Testament narratives.\(^\text{160}\) Almost predictably, the later Hellenistic recounting of the Joseph narrative has been transformed into what a Girardian theory of culture and literature would expect. For example, the Hellenistic retellings introduce a victim’s story that is not present in the accounts of Genesis. According to the Hellenistic version of the Joseph narrative, the prior stability of Egypt was supposedly disrupted by a group of outcasts who, for the sake of communal welfare, had to be banished in order to regain peace and unity.\(^\text{161}\) Again, unlike the biblical account, Joseph’s dream-interpreting abilities award him divine status, corroborating what Girardian theory would suspect from the normal progression of the scapegoating mechanism, which culminates in the


\(^{160}\) The Hellenistic Egyptian authors he uses are Hecataeus, Manetho, Diodours, Pompeius Trogus, Lysimachus, Apion, and Chaeremon. His sources for these authors are: Josephus’ *Against Apion* as well as other fragments collected in Menahem Stern, ed., *From Herodotus to Plutarch*, vol. 1 of *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1972-1984). See Williams, *Bible, Violence, and the Sacred*, 89-91. Regarding his sources for this conclusion, see Ibid., 270, n. 34.

\(^{161}\) Ibid., 59-60.
divinization of the victim. This comparison between Genesis and later Hellenistic Egyptian accounts supports Girard’s conclusions, showing scapegoats are often viewed as detrimental to normative society on the one hand and that the biblical texts have a unique perspective in championing the innocence of a non-divinized victim, in this case Joseph.

Along the same lines, Williams marshals a similar retelling of the Exodus accounts in the Hellenistic era that likewise casts the Hebrews as culprits, deserving of expulsion from Egypt. Even more intriguing are his observations that Freud’s recounting of the Exodus functions in a similar manner, blotting out the victimization of the Jewish people in Egypt and deleting their Jewishness altogether.\footnote{Ibid., 91-8.} In light of such later attempts to delete the victimization of persons like Joseph or people like the Jews, Williams indicates, even if he does not fully trace this out, that Girard’s theory can be substantiated in the desire of later authors to legitimate the expulsion of the Hebrews and suppress their victimization through various literary emendations.

In his biblical exegesis, Williams takes up the theme of covenant more readily than other Girardian commentators. For him, the covenant with Israel functions as a communal center, wherein the commandments mitigate the potential for the community to disintegrate into mimetic rivalry.\footnote{Ibid., 105.} The prohibitions and the punishments in the legal codes of the Old Testament are taken in stride as necessary for the gradual movement from a violent view of the sacred to nonviolence.\footnote{Ibid., 109.} However, even the legal codes are critiqued and transcended as revelation progresses. Here, Williams turns to the prophetic literature as the saving grace of the Old Testament. According to him, the prophets became victims in order to protect other victims and therefore stymie violence.\footnote{Ibid., 147.} For Williams, the eradication of violence is progressive in the
Bible, just as it is in Girard, beginning with the substitutions developed in the sacrificial cult, which are later displaced altogether by the revelation of their inherent violence. As a result, Williams possesses a form of salvation history similar to Girard, wherein the saving knowledge and revelation are gradually disclosed over the course of God’s history with his people in a transition from outright mimetic crisis to its suppression under the covenantal law. Despite its advances, even covenant law must be further critiqued by the prophets and the Gospels to inaugurate the ultimate emancipation from violence.

When he comes to the Gospels, he distances himself from Girard—at least Girard’s early statements about the Gospels—by saying that sacrificial language still appears in the course of the Gospels. However, as his argument progresses, it becomes clear that the sacrificial language of passages like the ransom sayings are in some sense necessary evils in order to help people transition from a sacrificial view of the world to a non-sacrificial one. One cannot transition from one view of the world to the next without using the structure and categories of the old world. His exegesis of the ransom sayings is compelling in some aspects, for he observes that the ransom saying of Mark 10:45 occurs in response to a quarrel among the disciples who are vying for power and prestige among themselves. According to Williams, they have become ensnared in mimetic rivalry. He then shows that the model of Jesus offering a ransom is actually a model of good mimesis, which cuts against the grain of his disciples’ narcissistic aspirations. The Son of Man’s offering of his life as a ransom therefore provides a different model than the mimetic rivalry typical of human culture.

---

166 Ibid., 188.
167 Ibid., 223-4.
Nevertheless, Williams still wrestles with the reason why the offering of Christ’s life is necessary as a ransom offering. Remaining true to Girard, he explains his thoughts on what Mark meant by depicting the death of Christ as ransom in the following manner:

… I think that Mark probably intends to say, in effect, “The human condition is such that only the price of the Son of Man’s suffering and death will have the effect of loosening the bonds of the sacred social structure, enabling human beings to see what their predicament is and the kind of faith and action that will bring liberation.”168

Thus, by using the sacrificial language of “ransom,” the Gospel writers are diffusing the sacrificial theology implicit in the term. To corroborate his non-sacrificial reading of the ransom sayings, he turns to Luke, who, despite using Mark’s Gospel as a source, does not employ the ransom sayings at all. Williams then concludes that Luke is correcting what was potentially misleading in Mark’s utilization of sacrificial language.169

Williams likewise reads the Last Supper sayings in a non-sacrificial manner. As he notes, the usual sacrificial transaction, which goes from humans to God, has been inverted. In the Last Supper sayings, God is giving “himself as victim to the worshipers.”170 As a result, it presages the death of Christ where he will be handed over to the mimetic contagion of the crowds. Similar to his treatment of the ransom sayings, he notes that Luke has a different version of the Last Supper discourse which is less sacrificial in nature—the blood “poured out for many” is not present—and instead depicts the solidarity formed through participation in the Eucharist. Thus, the Last Supper discourse does not portray Jesus’ death as a sacrifice in his account.171

168 Ibid., 224.
169 Ibid., 202.
170 Ibid., 194.
171 Ibid., 202. He avers as well that Mark and Matthew do not depict a sacrificial transaction despite their sacrificial language.
Still there are weaknesses in Williams handling of the Last Supper sayings. He does not develop the soteriology of the Last Supper sayings beyond the normal Girardian assertion that Christ’s death reveals the innocence of victims. In addition, despite his engagement with the importance of the covenant in the Old Testament, he surprisingly fails to take up the covenantal allusions in the Last Supper discourse, which is even present in the Lukan tradition that he prefers. Moreover, emphasizing the covenantal allusions would have made the connection between Old and New Testaments more apparent in light of the larger context of his book.

In the final chapter, Williams, who thus far in the book seems to have endorsed Girard’s ethic of nonviolence, turns to current events and the question of international affairs. While it seems that Girard’s thesis would necessitate an absolute commitment to nonviolence, Williams seems to annul most of what he argues for in the book. Not only does he consider just war a constituent of a group of “valid positions,” he also suggests that the Western world, in the Gulf War, was perhaps right in using violence in order to keep Saddam Hussein from perpetrating more violence. In the end, he advocates pursuing nonviolence as much as feasible, but seems to concede that pacifism or a stringent policy of nonviolence might not be sufficient for dealing with the problems on the international scene. While Williams is to be commended for putting his theology to use in the real world, his cautious support of violent countermeasures to curb mimetic crises elsewhere suggests that he doubts the ability of the revelation of the innocent victim to lead the world to repentance. Thus, in spite of a rather innovative work that substantiates some of Girard’s claims in the biblical texts, one can question whether he believes Girard’s thought proffers a robust way of remedying the problems of a broken world. At

172 In Luke 22:20, Jesus says, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”  
173 Williams, *Bible, Violence, and the Sacred*, 244-5.  
174 One can look at Girard’s rather forceful denunciation of all violence, even self-defense in Girard, *Things Hidden*, 198.
most, nonviolence seems to be reserved for particular, localized communities since it seems impotent on a global scale.

2.A.3. Robert Hamerton-Kelly

Schwager and Williams have both evaluated Girard’s reading across Old and New Testaments. Others have read more specific portions of the New Testament from a Girardian perspective. For instance, Robert Hamerton-Kelly, in Sacred Violence, reads the Pauline literature from a Girardian vantage point. More pertinent to this study is his reading of Mark from a Girardian perspective, published in The Gospel and the Sacred. In his reading of Mark, he begins with what he sees as the central aspect of Jesus’ ministry, the Temple cleansing. He argues that Jesus’ action in the temple constitute the demystification of the temple, which sat at the sacred center of first century Judaism. This prophetic action spelled the end of the sacrificial system, calling for its replacement by a different kind of order no longer centered on the violent sacred and its practices. Not only is the sacrifice of animals in the Temple cult problematic, all kinds of substitutional exchanges—even monetary substitutions—are equally problematic because they continue to repress the actual violence taking place in the temple cult.

While Hamerton-Kelly argues for Jesus being against violence and the sacrificial system, he never

---

defends the Temple action’s violence in *The Gospel and the Sacred* even though it is an event which could be at variance with his otherwise nonviolent reading of Jesus.

Nevertheless, there is much to be commended in Hamerton-Kelly’s work. He does remain attentive to restoration theology and the presence of hopes for a new exodus, which will be an essential part of our study later. According to him, however, these hopes are anticipating the emancipation from “sacred violence.” For him, the hope for a new exodus is freedom from sacrificial religion altogether, which was not complete in the first exodus with its cultic rituals and the destruction of the Egyptians. Likewise, Hamerton-Kelly addresses the tension in Mark between insiders and outsiders. In a creative approach to this textual dynamic, he argues that the language is not that of a circle which completely excludes the other but a spiral that allows one to continue in progression through many layers of realization. Thus, the language that might otherwise appear as bifurcating the listeners of Jesus into insiders and outsiders simply depicts people at different points along the path of realizing the revelation of the Gospel.

Regarding the more explicit atonement theology in the Gospel of Mark, like the ransom sayings, he reads them in light of Girard’s mimetic theory: “According to our theory and in terms of the metaphor, Jesus went into captivity to the [Generative Mimetic Scapegoat Mechanism] in order that we might be released from it. He gave his life as a ransom to the powers of mimetic rivalry, and because the mimetic rivalry is ours, strictly speaking he gave himself to us.” This, he notes, is still a substitutionary death since Jesus becomes the victim in place of others. However, in affirming the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death, he does not

---

179 Ibid., 122-5.
180 Ibid., 71. In his rebuttal of other readings of the ransom statements in Mark, he simply says that a sacrificial reading would have the ransom being paid to God. However, he overlooks the classic Christus Victor reading has the ransom being paid to the devil.
relinquish the non-sacrificial reading by maintaining that the purpose was to reveal the pathology of scapegoating.

When he comes to the Last Supper sayings, he sees the Last Supper as a corollary to the Temple cleansing and therefore as another inversion of sacrifice instead of a sacrifice in the usual understanding of the term. Rather than humans bringing their offerings to God, he notes that Jesus describes God, in the person of Jesus, giving himself to human beings. The Last Supper depicts a new form of substitution meant to displace the Temple cult. The upper room correlates with the Temple while the body and blood stand in the place of the sacrificial victim. Thus, the sacrificial transaction occurs in reverse order and outside of the prescribed sacred space, nullifying and bringing the sacred order to an end.

Even though Hamerton-Kelly has produced a thoroughgoing Girardian reading of Mark, it is not without its problems. He has, for instance, been liable to the charge of pressing the Gospel of Mark into a solitary mold where the divergent voices and counter evidence are silenced. In fact, his reading of Mark seems to hinge upon an a priori commitment to Girard. Furthermore, his understanding of the Jewish hopes for restoration has been unnecessarily reduced to the scapegoat mechanism. The next several chapters of this study will provide a more robust understanding of restoration theology and its influence upon the Gospel writers. Nevertheless, by reducing the soteriological problem informing restoration theology into freedom from scapegoating, Hamerton-Kelly has read the ransom saying and the Last Supper saying in this light. Unfortunately, this causes him to miss some of the soteriological implications present in the passages, including the covenantal language in the Last Supper,

---

182 Stephen Finamore, God, Order, and Chaos: René Girard and the Apocalypse (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 125.
which would allow him to see that Jesus’ death does not simply produce reconciliation among his followers but also between God and them.

2.A.4. Bruce Chilton

Bruce Chilton’s work, The Temple of Jesus, engages Girard’s work in the context of a historical Jesus project. While the dialogue with Girard fades from view in the middle portions of the book, his conversation with Girard bookends the work. Chilton remains receptive, yet critical of Girard’s proposal. One weakness Chilton identifies is Girard’s quantum leap from ancient forms and understandings of sacrifice to modern violence.\(^\text{183}\) While continuity does exist, Chilton is correct to critique Girard on this point since not all ancient sacrifices were violent.\(^\text{184}\) His second critique concerns Girard’s conclusion that mimesis in general is only a negative force.\(^\text{185}\) Although Chilton thinks mimesis has great explanatory potential for understanding human culture and its developments, he thinks Girard’s equation of mimesis with violence is too simplistic since mimesis can be used for good and ill purposes.

For Chilton, sacrifice is not chiefly the violent transaction that Girard takes it to be but “a feast with the gods, in which life as it should be—chosen and prepared correctly—is taken in order to produce life as it ought to be.”\(^\text{186}\) This understanding of sacrifice informs his discussion

---

\(^{183}\) Bruce Chilton, The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 24-5. Much of what he develops in the aforementioned volume also appears, without substantial development, in his later essay, “The Eucharist and the Mimesis of Sacrifice,” in Sacrifice, Scripture, and Substitution, ed. Ann W. Astell and Sandor Goodhart (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 140-54. To be fair to Girard on this point, his underlying assumption is that sacrifices began as a way to diffuse and cure violence. If this much is granted, his epochal leap is not unwarranted. See Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 1-14.


\(^{185}\) Chilton, Temple of Jesus, 163-72. This critique seems overstated on the part of Chilton, at least in light of Girard’s more recent works that clearly attest a positive role to mimesis. See his later qualification that the way forward is not renouncing mimetic desire, but converting it. Rebecca Adams and René Girard, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard,” Religion & Literature 25, no. 2 (1993): 24.

\(^{186}\) Chilton, Temple of Jesus, 41.
of Jesus’ critique of the temple and his understanding of sacrifice more generally. According to Chilton, sacrifice, or the meal with God, in no way created one’s purity within the covenant in Jesus’ thought. It was always a result of an anterior purity that made such communion possible. Moreover, this purity was available through forgiveness outside of cultic practices.

According to Chilton, the Temple cult drew the ire of Jesus when it began separating and distancing the Jewish worshippers from their offerings. The worshipers were supposed to offer their own animals, not use money to buy someone else’s merchandise. Because of such staunch opposition to the economic exchanges and substitutions in the Temple, Jesus responded by driving out the sellers in order to purify the Temple cult. This attempt, however, fails. Jesus, like the Qumran community, is forced to withdraw from the Temple practice altogether. In his separation from the Temple cult, Jesus makes a religious innovation, though one that is still in concert with some of his contemporaries. Although he had been holding communal meals with his followers throughout his ministry, after separating from the Temple cult, Jesus declares that eating the communal meal is a valid substitute for sacrifice in the Temple. In light of the fact that Jesus frequently held meals with his followers, Chilton concludes that there was nothing unique about the Last Supper other than that it was the last, completely overlooking the Passover-like nature the meal has in the Synoptics, which might shed more light on the significance of the meal for the authors.

---

187 Ibid., 123.
188 Ibid., 133.
189 Ibid., 130; Chilton, “Eucharist,” 144.
190 Chilton, Temple of Jesus, 150-4; idem, “Eucharist,” 145-6.
191 While certainly it was not unique for Jesus to eat with his disciples, the Synoptic association of the Last Supper with Passover suggests there was something distinctive about this meal, which alluded to the Jewish hopes for restoration and saw Jesus’ death in light of this backdrop. See N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 553-63.
Chilton also strips the Last Supper sayings of any kind of reference to Christ’s death. When the Synoptics portray Jesus as equating the wine with his blood and the bread with his body, Jesus was not referring to his actual body and blood, but rather claiming that the bread and wine were a substitute for a sacrifice he might otherwise have offered in the temple. This complete displacement of the Temple cult then becomes the catalyst for the death of Jesus at the behest of the religious leaders. Absent from his discussion on the Last Supper sayings in the *Temple of Jesus* is any comment on the origins of the association with the covenant, nor does he explain why Matthew goes on to add that whatever was being symbolized in the meal was “for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

It is left to Chilton’s later monograph, *A Feast of Meanings*, for him to take up the connection of the covenant with the Last Supper sayings. In this particular volume, Chilton constructs a history of the early Christian notion of the Eucharist, from its early inception with Christ and adumbrates the manner in which the early Christian communities add certain dimensions to it. According to Chilton, the connection between the Eucharist and the covenant arose through the Petrine community and was not original with Jesus. Interestingly, Chilton shows that the connection between the Last Supper and Exodus 24 should be expected, at least if one adopts his understanding of Jesus’ final meals. He notes that the sacrifice on Sinai depicted in Exodus 24 was a “sacrifice of sharings,” basically a shared meal, which is “the implicit paradigm within Jesus’ practice of fellowship in Jerusalem, after his occupation of the

---

192 I would question whether the substitution of a meal for the Temple cult would be enough to make Jesus a target for the Jewish authorities. The Essenes also had substitutions in various forms and were not targeted as a result. See Craig A. Evans, “The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice,” *Trinity Journal* 14 (1993): 220-1.

193 Chilton, *Temple of Jesus*, 153. It is presumed to be a product of the early Church. While such a conclusion could be true, this could also constitute a simplified manner of dismissing evidence to the contrary.
Thus, the Last Supper’s connection to the covenant adds nothing new to his understanding of Jesus’ replacement program. Since the sacrifice on Sinai was a shared meal with YHWH, Jesus was simply advocating the substitution of such meals for sacrifices in the Temple. Thus, he deems the Petrine community’s connection between Jesus’ final meal and the Sinai sacrifice legitimate.

According to Chilton, the connection between the Last Supper and the Passover was an artifice introduced through the followers of James. James’ party was much more exclusive, and effectively restricted the celebration of the meals to the circumcised by introducing the association with Passover. As a result, the Gentiles were forbidden from partaking of the meals. Paul, of course, opposes the agenda of James and seeks to recover the Petrine emphasis on the covenant. Paul does so, by identifying the Eucharist as a “new covenant.” Chilton then argues that the addition of the word “new” does not echo the prophecy of Jeremiah 31, but instead constitutes a new “covenantal requirement” that is supposed to be performed by all baptized Christians. In addition, Chilton seems to credit Paul with introducing atonement theology into the Last Supper sayings. He notes that the sacrifice depicted in the Lukan and Pauline traditions is not a sacrifice of sharings, but a sacrifice for sin in the theological vein that informed the author of 4 Maccabees.

In *Abraham’s Curse*, Chilton does address the ransom saying found in Mark and Matthew. Rather than taking this as a theological interpretation of Jesus’ death, Chilton interprets them within the larger construct of Jesus’ discipleship that demanded his followers be

---

195 Chilton, *Feast of Meanings*, 104.
196 Ibid., 114.
197 Ibid., 116-26.
willing to suffer. In essence, Chilton says that the ransom sayings mean: “Each person is to give his life as a redemption (purqana’), which is a sacrificial term that refers to how an offering given to God brings all who participate into the circle of forgiveness, celebration, and divine favor that sacrifice creates.”\(^{198}\) To summarize, every follower of Jesus had to be willing to give his or her life as a martyr.

Although Chilton has addressed some of the sayings that will be the focus of our study, he does so in an unsatisfactory way. First, his treatment of the Last Supper sayings fails to elucidate the significance of the Last Supper’s connection with the Passover other than to make it the artifice of an exclusive group,\(^ {199}\) not to mention how the sayings could be read in light of Jewish hopes for restoration. The rather obvious connection with the new covenant of Jeremiah is dismissed in favor of a more elaborate explanation of Paul introducing a more inclusive Eucharistic practice. Second, his treatment atomizes the text as we have it, creating elaborate hypotheses that seem difficult to substantiate in history. Daly, who seems to deliver a favorable judgment on Chilton’s conclusions, still thinks Chilton has “over-interpretation” in his account.\(^ {200}\) Such over-interpretation imperils Chilton’s final conclusions.

One major concern is that Chilton’s atomization of the text separates the terms used in the Last Supper discourses from their literary context. Chief among these is his isolation of “blood” from “blood of the covenant,” which obliterates an otherwise obvious allusion to Sinai in Exodus 24:8. In addition, when he does finally address the allusion to the Sinai covenant, his understanding of sacrifice as a meal shared with YHWH avoids some of the sacrificial

---

\(^ {198}\) Chilton, *Abraham’s Curse*, 78.

\(^ {199}\) I also think that the connection with the Passover in all of the traditions available to us can hardly be explained as a later addition, especially when he thinks inter-textual dependence for the Synoptics is unlikely. See Chilton, *Temple of Jesus*, 113-6.

understanding of the covenant sacrifices at Sinai, especially as the accounts are read in Jewish
tradition somewhat contemporary with the writing of the Gospels. As we will see later, both
*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Targum Onqelos* see the covenant sacrifice of Exodus 24 as
effecting atonement, which therefore allows the communal meal to occur. Thus, even though
Chilton offers a robust proposal of how to approach the Last Supper sayings that sees them non-
sacrificially, his account seems to evade the evidence that might imperil his thesis. When he
does engage it, it is simply the result of warring ideologies among the parties of the early church,
which are next to impossible to substantiate on the basis of the texts as they exist.

2. A. 5. Questions over Girard’s Exegesis

Although many people have adopted Girard’s reading of the biblical texts and tried to
appropriate them in various ways, others have been more skeptical and have even belligerently
opposed his reading of the Gospels. One of the more potentially damaging criticisms leveled
against Girard’s reading of the Gospels has contended that Girard has identified the wrong victim
in the Gospels. The problem, or so the criticism goes, is that Jesus is cast as an innocent victim
in order to make the Jewish community a new scapegoat, bearing culpability for Christ’s death.
For example, in John Darr’s article, “Mimetic Desire, the Gospels, and Early Christianity,” he
faults Girard for reading the Gospels in an “ahistorical” fashion. According to Darr, this
constitutes a missed opportunity for Girard, since he sees the Gospels as generated in the last
thirty years of the first century when various Christian groups vied for control among each other.

---

201 Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 48. They at least see the connection explicit in Matthew, but I would suggest it is present also in Mark, Luke, and Paul as well, though more in the presumption that covenant renewal meant that sin has been dealt with.

and against Judaism. This, he suggests is where Girard’s mimetic theory should come into play, not in trying to analyze the events of the Passion narrative. The “real” story is the social conflict in which the Gospel writers lived as the various parties were trying to gain validity for their group within Judaism’s identity crisis after the Temple’s destruction. In addition to the above, Darr also points out that Girard reads the Gospels as a monolithic whole and thereby fails to honor the individual portraits depicted in each of the Gospels. Once the literary context is surrendered, Darr says that any interpretation can then be placed on the text. Thus, he remains skeptical of Girard’s reading of the Gospels, indicating that its legitimacy remains to be demonstrated.

Following in a similar vein, Burton Mack uses Girard’s own theory of social formation to show that the scapegoating mechanism is alive and well in the Gospels. According to Mack, the Gospels are not to be read in light of the story they purport to tell—the manner in which Girard reads them with Christ as the central victim—but in light of the social conflicts over identity with which the early Christian communities were engaged vis-à-vis Judaism in the first century. He avers on multiple occasions that Jesus was not the innocent victim that the Gospels depict, even though Mack never provides a crime or reason justifying Jesus’ execution. The notion of Christ’s martyrdom, essentially his innocent death, became important for the early Christians to justify their separation from Judaism. In order to further this social bifurcation, the Gospels

203 Ibid., 362.
204 Ibid., 358-9.
place the opprobrium for Christ’s death on the shoulders of the Jews. By reading the Gospels from the perspectives of the communities that wrote them during the “parting of the ways,” Mack inverts the victims and persecutors. He concludes that the early Christians are in fact the persecutors who put the blame on the Jews, the new victims. Thus, the Gospels still remain texts of persecution that surreptitiously use an “innocent victim” to create a new victim in the Jews. While Mack’s argument illuminates the fact that there are more dimensions to reading the Gospels than simply the narratives they recount, Mack’s reading of the Gospels seems to discount any access to the historical Jesus, concluding instead that the Gospels tell us about the history of Christianity and not about Jesus, which seems to be overstating his case.

Darr and Mack both raise interesting questions about the texts that we have from the Gospels. Although the social scientific reading of the Gospels does highlight the tenacity with which the desire to castigate other groups emerges in the Christian community, it does not completely undermine Girard’s thesis. It simply shows that the Gospel writers themselves are not emancipated from such a tendency, as both of them acknowledge. At the same time, there is very little evidence from the separation of Christianity and Judaism that would allow modern researches to verify Darr’s and Mack’s arguments with confidence. In addition, one can point out that both of these authors fail to account for the fact that Jesus only became a central figure

207 Mack, “Innocent Transgressor,” 155. He writes, “The gospels are not history. We have known that, or should have known that for fifty years now. They are myths claiming to be history.” See also Mack, Myth of Innocence, 9-14. Such assertions at least need to engage the entire historical Jesus school and denounce the various criteria employed to legitimate the statements of Jesus.
208 Finamore, God, Order and Chaos, 121. Girard contests the charge of anti-Semitism in the Gospels by saying that the Jewish alliance against Jesus is meant to show the influence of mimetic contagion spread across the community, not that the culpability for Jesus’ death falls on the Jewish community. See Girard, I See Satan, 25-6, 85.
209 See the oblique response to Mack in Hamerton-Kelly, “Messiah,” 481-3. Here Hamerton-Kelly points out the dearth of sources available for us to substantiate Mack’s view, which does not allow us to verify his conclusions. In addition, Hamerton-Kelly argues that the opprobrium placed on the Jewish people is not trying to victimize the Jewish people but simply identify that they are the actors in the narrative controlled by the scapegoating mechanism.
in the Gospel accounts because Jesus met some of the Jewish hopes for restoration in the early first century. Without some foundational events, there was no reason for later groups laying claim to him as a legitimate religious leader or as a foundation for their community identity. Finally, Girard’s own response to this charge has been to point out that labeling the Gospels as anti-Semitic simply makes a new scapegoat out of the text and further perpetuates the cycle on the very texts that have illuminated the human pathology of scapegoating.  

2.B. Systematic Theology

In addition to the various biblical scholars that have taken up Girard’s work, several theologians and philosophers have also adopted his approach in various fashions. For example, Gil Bailie published a provocative study that provides examples of the nature in which Girard’s anthropology illuminates our understanding of human violence. In adopting most of Girard’s point of view with minor qualifications, Bailie succeeds in showing that violence still plagues modern society in various forms where humans still justify their violence and ignore the victims. Andrew McKenna has successfully brought Girard and Jacques Derrida into conversation with each other, showing that the two different hermeneutics can be complementary to each other and that the two authors might not be as opposed as some suggest. In fact, he argues that Derrida’s deconstruction needs Girard’s awareness of the victim to safeguard it from degenerating into another form of hermeneutical violence. Robert Daly has likewise adjusted his earlier conclusions on Christian sacrifice as a result of Girard’s work. In his more recent work, he puts forth a view that sees Christ’s sacrifice as the offering of the Trinitarian life to humans rather

---

210 Girard, Scapegoat, 109.
than an appeasement of God’s justice. On the human side, sacrifice is the participative response to this Trinitarian life. As a result, Daly has used Girard’s work to construct a view of sacrifice that preserves the notion of sacrifice from any form of substitution or expiation. Certainly Girard’s works have been influential in recent theological discourse and continue to be digested in ever widening circles. Several writers have made significant theological contributions by utilizing Girard’s basic assumptions, some of which are described in what follows.

2.B.1. James Alison

Of the various appropriators of Girard, few match the voluminous endeavor of James Alison who has taken up Girard’s theory of atonement and placed it into the context of what purports to be a more explicitly Catholic approach. Alison’s work constitutes a rather significant step forward in many regards. First, Alison seems to blend the soteriological emphases in Schwager and Girard together to form a much more balanced soteriology. Alison manages to balance evenly Girard’s dominant emphasis on the revelation of human sin and Schwager’s primary emphasis on the revelation of the goodness of God by positing the Christ event as equally revealing both the depth of human sin and the goodness of God’s grace in response to human sin. As a result, he manages to harness the emphases of both authors.

---

213 Daly, Sacrifice Unveiled, 10.
216 Alison, Being Wrong, 83.
Second, Alison has sought to make the resurrection more central to his soteriology and anthropology than other followers of Girard, which is an advance beyond Girard’s own sporadic and often underdeveloped references to it. In fact, in the *Joy of Being Wrong*, Alison argues that Christianity’s understanding of the human problem (i.e. original sin) needs to be constructed from the vantage point of the resurrection. For him, a doctrine of original sin cannot be known antecedent to the Christ event, but is an *a posteriori* construction that can only be constructed after the resurrection. He writes, “… the doctrine of original sin is not prior to, but follows from and is utterly dependent on, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and thus cannot be understood at all except in the light of that event.” The resurrection of Jesus, which Alison affirms is literal and historical, reveals for the apostles the innocence of Christ thereby bringing full exposure to the scapegoat mechanism that had led to his death. Not only does it validate the innocence of Christ, it also demonstrates that God responds to human violence with pardon, not revenge. As God’s final word in the Christ event, the resurrection illuminates two important theological ideas: first, humans are violent, which finds its climax in the cross, and second, God is wholly other, “entirely without violence.”

Third, like Schwager, Alison willingly takes up the Gospels’ depiction of Jesus’ death as necessary and outlines two distinct reasons for this necessity. First, the repeated fulfillment

---

217 One of the regrets expressed by Girard is that his analysis seems to require the use of mimetic theory to explain the Gospels. He admits that his personal journey to the Gospels began with mimetic theory, but suggests that a “more fundamental understanding” can begin with the Gospels in order to explicate mimetic theory. See Girard, *Girard Reader*, 265-6.

218 Ibid., 3; cf. James Alison, *On Being Liked* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 24. Although Alison avers that he is constructing theology from Christ backward, his thorough reshaping of soteriology in light of mimetic theory suggests that he is also making the door fit the pre-existing house (an image he uses to describe how soteriology is usually made to fit presupposed notions of the human problem).

219 Alison, *Raising Abel*, 26-7; idem, *Knowing Jesus*, 11, 26. In affirming the historicity of the accounts, Alison argues against other approaches to the resurrection, forcing his readers into an either-or situation. Either the Gospel accounts of the resurrection are objectively and historically true or the Gospels hold no objective value for us altogether. On this, see Alison, *Being Wrong*, 70-7.

220 Alison, *Being Wrong*, 74, 98.

221 Ibid., 83.
motif in Scripture, which he calls the “theological” dimension, shows that Jesus’ death was anticipated as a part of God’s redemption. While this reason could potentially lead one to see Jesus’ death as demanded by some divine choice, Alison argues that the theological reason is only present because of the second reason for this necessity, namely, that human depravity could not see its sordidness through any other means. The only way for God to reveal the true gift of himself to the world is “taking the form of a man substituting himself for the sacrificial lamb proper to the social order based on murder.” According to Alison, the nature of human sin is the only factor that truly necessitates the death of Jesus.

Fourth, Alison goes much further than Girard in trying to construct an ecclesiology based upon Girard’s insights. Following Girard, Alison endorses “the slow pruning of violence from God” by portraying God as the one who is without violence, the one who does not enforce identity boundaries. As a result, Alison sees the Gospel as the toppling and subversion of human culture in order to erect “a new sacred order, the order which is built without victims…” Consequently, Alison concludes that such an order implies that there are no divisions between “insiders” and “outsiders.” If there is any division of judgment between insiders and outsiders, this division derives from the human choice to reject the offer to live from a different basis, namely, from the victim. As a result, the victim becomes the foundation of a new kind of ecclesiology, one where the community exists to protect the excluded and outcast.

---

222 Ibid., 171.
223 Ibid., 171-2.
224 Ibid., 174.
225 Alison, Raising Abel, 108.
226 Alison, Being Wrong, 83.
227 Alison, Raising Abel, 107.
228 Ibid., 127. See also Alison, On Being Liked, 29. This is consistent with Girard’s own formulations. See Girard, Things Hidden, 202.
229 Alison, Being Wrong, 124.
Alison’s approach to the Last Supper sayings shows similarities with other Girardian interpreters as well as some of his own innovations. Alison, unlike Chilton, strongly avers that Jesus’ Last Supper was indeed a Passover celebration. The connection with the Passover is important for Alison, because the Passover was a meal that connoted the exodus, which combined two separate themes. On the one hand, the Passover represented God’s call for Israel to be his covenant people. As God’s covenant people, they were to be a society different from their neighbors, one in which the widows and orphans would carry equal status. On the other hand, the Passover signified Israel’s expulsion by the Egyptians and hence reminded them of the way in which they had been victims at the hands of the Egyptians. God’s covenant with the Jewish people set them apart as people who were protectors of the victims.

By connecting the Last Supper with the Passover and its surrounding context of exodus and covenant, Alison sees Jesus assuming Israel’s identity and mission in his final meal. Furthermore, the manner in which Jesus alludes to his death against the backdrop of the exodus situates Jesus’ death as another egregious instance of expulsion and victimization. Just as Israel was birthed through its expulsion, so Jesus, in his expulsion, would generate a new covenant community while simultaneously revealing the “victimary basis of all societies, including even, sadly, Jewish society.” In the confluence of impending death and the Last Supper, Jesus revealed that the community he was founding was one that worshipped God “from the victim, and not over against, or by exclusion of, the victim.” As such, the community founded by Christ was the logical fulfillment of God’s covenant with Israel and was to provide

---

230 Alison, Knowing Jesus, 66. He writes, “… Jesus comes and celebrates his Passover meal. Please notice that he didn’t celebrate a sort of mock-Passover, or parody of the Passover with his disciples, so as to give them a different, critical basis for their relationship to Israel. He celebrated the Passover.”

231 Ibid., 65.

232 Alison, Being Wrong, 172.

233 Alison, Knowing Jesus, 66-8.

234 Alison, Being Wrong, 172.

235 Alison, Knowing Jesus, 72 (emphasis is his).
humanity with a model for constructing social structures that no longer depend upon exclusion and subjugation of others in order to survive. In fact, instead of producing victims, it now comes to their aid.

While much of Alison’s interpretation of the Last Supper sayings focuses on the connection with the covenant and the exodus, he is aware of the sacrificial terminology present in them as well as possible allusions to Isaiah’s Suffering Servant.\footnote{Alison, \textit{Being Wrong}, 172.} Instead of interpreting the Last Supper sayings as an indication that Jesus is bearing Israel’s sin, he interprets them, like Hammerton-Kelly, as depicting the inversion of the sacrificial order. To substantiate this interpretation, Alison believes YHWH’s covenant with Israel set Israel on a path away from the sacrificial order. Since Jesus is the culmination of the covenant and hastening its \textit{telos}, then it only seems logical to understand the sacrificial terminology present there as subversive of sacrificial theology. The irony in Alison’s interpretation is that he is aware that the covenant sacrifice on Sinai (Exodus 24:8) was interpreted as an expiation in the first century, something which will be developed in future chapters.\footnote{Alison, \textit{Knowing Jesus}, 68. Regarding the covenantal sacrifices on Sinai in Exodus 24, he writes: “This was not, in all probability, a sacrifice for the expiation of sins, when it was first performed, but by Jesus’ time it was understood as such.”} Unfortunately, Alison does not use his knowledge of these interpretive traditions to interpret the cross but instead interprets it in precisely the opposite manner.

Despite Alison’s impressive work, there are some areas that call for reservation. Although one can credit Alison with reading the biblical texts carefully, he often admits the presence of counter-evidence, which might demand a reconsideration of his proposal. For example, he is very much aware that when the early Christians, informed by the Old Testament, sought to interpret the Christ event, they would have readily seen him as assuming the
punishment for Israel’s sin. In fact, he even goes so far as to concede that Jesus himself possessed this same “victimary self-understanding” that flowed from the Old Testament knowledge of God. He qualifies this as a “provisional” understanding of God, one that must be transcended in order to see God as completely free from violence. Interestingly, this view of God was only possible after the resurrection, which means that Jesus’ entire ministry might have been conducted with this understanding. With these admissions in view, Alison’s readers are justified in asking why, in light of the counter-evidence, one must take the Girardian interpretation of the cross. Moreover, one can certainly question whether his understanding of the covenant as solely in defense of the victim is comprehensive enough to govern his interpretation of the Last Supper discourse.

In addition, one can also question whether Alison has truly constructed a notion of original sin completely from the Christ event. His reliance upon Girard’s mimetic theory to explain the human problem is potentially problematic for this claim. Throughout The Joy of Being Wrong, Alison is involved in a dialectical interchange between mimetic theory and the Christ event wherein they are both mutually explicatory of each other. Mimetic theory is used

---

238 Alison, Being Wrong, 108.
239 Alison does not offer an explanation as to why these notions of God must be laid aside, especially in light of the fact that he is willing to attribute them to Jesus. He seems to open himself up for criticism here. When addressing the modern way in which people demythologize the resurrection accounts of the Gospels, Alison faults those who take a subjective interpretation of the resurrection for several things: first, for merely pretending to uphold the apostolic witness when they in fact do not, and second as a failure to honor the “alterity” of the texts that might challenge our view of reality (Ibid., 72). Perhaps the same criticisms can be applied to his theological interpretation of the Christ event found in the New Testament, since the sacrificial theology that he acknowledges as present must be laid aside to find a more palatable theology for our modern consciousness. This same progression from a victimary theology to one free of violence is also seen in the evolution of the idea of God’s wrath. See Ibid., 127-8.
240 While there is certainly emphasis that the covenant expected Israel to defend the victims, he is completely wrong to say that the covenant demands “that slaves not be made” (Ibid., 134). Slaves were indeed permitted by the covenantal stipulations.
241 I am in agreement here with Kirwan. See Kirwan, Philosophy and Theology, 60; cf. 68. In the latter passage he seems to be endorsing Alison a bit too much and not distinguishing his voice from Alison’s as clearly. I take the former passage as indicative of Kirwan’s position on Alison.
242 Charles Hefling, “A View from the Stern: James Alison’s Theology (So Far),” ATR 81, 4 (1999): 691. The author, at least implicitly, hints that this is the case without developing it further.
to understand the Christ event, and the Christ event is used to describe mimetic theory and its solution (i.e. “pacific mimesis”). At one point, he even seems to take back his bold assertions when he writes that original sin “is not only a one-shot job, made possible by a particular miraculous intervention (the resurrection), even though it could not, of course, have been understood without the resurrection.”243 This admission suggests that Alison is not simply inferring the human problem from the resurrection, but is working dialectically between the resurrection and Girard’s mimetic theory.

Although Alison seems to apply his boundary-less ecclesiology consistently in the majority of instances, there are points at which he contravenes his own assertions that God and the church are without boundaries. For example, in *Raising Abel*, he ventures into a rehabilitation of God’s eschatological judgment, calling it “very real and very terrible.”244 It seems difficult to affirm a God without boundaries and hold to some kind of eschatological judgment, which does impose boundary divisions upon people. Nevertheless, he does attempt to ameliorate this boundary-making judgment by adopting Origen’s view of Hell where conversion is always possible in the afterlife, though not immediately granted for all. To be clear, he says the threat of punishment should never be brandished against others and is only a threat to oneself.245 Nevertheless, the continuing presence of eschatological judgment retains enough traces of traditional Christian eschatology to be a detriment to his appropriation of Girard, at least in my opinion, for it resurrects the boundary distinctions that he claimed were absent from God.

243 Alison, *Being Wrong*, 130.
244 Alison, *Raising Abel*, 158. In addition, the guilt of exclusionary practices “remains.” See Alison, *Being Wrong*, 122.
In fact, Alison himself cannot avoid labeling some people as outsiders. At one point, he oversteps his limited use of judgment—which he says should only ever be self-referential—and turns it against those who seem too self-righteous to love social outcasts.\textsuperscript{246} While one could say this is a logical result of Alison’s theological appropriation of Girard, one must also admit that the community who possesses an identity focused on the victim cannot simultaneously embrace persecutors as its members without jeopardizing its identity. Outsiders still seem to exist, and one can also point to Alison’s castigation of pietism as an inferior approach to Christianity as another instance in which the same old demarcations of “insider” and “outsider” are simply redrawn to include and exclude new constituents.\textsuperscript{247}

Finally, in places, Alison’s ecclesiology is redolent of supersessionism, which is problematic if one wishes to desist from creating insiders and outsiders. Although he affirms that Jesus was the implicit culmination of Israel’s faith, and thereby only delivering a critique “by accident,” at several points he affirms that Christianity makes certain improvements that advance beyond the Jewish conception of God.\textsuperscript{248} In fact, the revelation delivered in Christ, “blew apart the understanding of God that had developed over the centuries among the Jewish

\textsuperscript{246} Ibid., 158.

\textsuperscript{247} Alison, \textit{Knowing Jesus}, 102-6. This is not to say that pietism lies beyond criticism. My only problem is that denouncing pietistic Christians seems to obviate his earlier statement that we fail to know Jesus when “… we behave as though some group to which we belong is … more truth-bearing than, some other group” (Ibid., 89). Again, he brandishes the warning of future judgment against the pietists, which seems to contradict the very essence of his Christianity without boundaries (Ibid., 103-4). See also his castigation of “traditional evangelical protestants” in Alison, \textit{On Being Liked}, 29. As Sandor Goodhart has cautioned, one cannot use Girard’s admonition of the victim’s innocence in order to align oneself against the perpetrators. This simply perpetuates the scapegoat cycle. Rather, the innocence of the victim is to heighten one’s own sense of culpability, not find a new target. See Sandor Goodhart, \textit{The Prophetic Law: Essays in Judaism, Girardianism, Literary Studies, and the Ethical} (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2014), xxvi-xxvii.

\textsuperscript{248} Alison, \textit{Being Wrong}, 85-6; cf. 90, 165. Even though he has sections where he affirms Jesus’ critique against Judaism as a fulfillment and not a displacement of Israel’s identity (esp. Ibid., 178-84, 238), other sections take a more super-sessionistic turn. In speaking about the kind of faith Jesus called forth in his disciples, he writes that Jesus “produced in them a certain sort of faith in God, going a step beyond the Jewish faith in the imagelessness of God by permitting the discovery of a particular image of God. This image of God is the human victim” (Ibid., 58). The same can be said of Girard as well. See Depoortere, \textit{Christ in Postmodern Philosophy}, 145.
people.” Any form of improvement or advancement suggests the former construct was insufficient, and Judaism emerges as an insufficient theological construct for Alison, despite his attempts at affirming the continuity between Christ and Judaism.

The above tensions in Alison’s theology show the inherent paradox that confronts his ecclesiological appropriation of Girard. On the one hand, the application of Girard leads quite clearly and directly to a boundary-less community. On the other hand, the simple articulation of the theology behind this boundary-less community only serves to draw distinctions between people who do and do not embody the ideology of the community. If the community truly welcomes all, including those who believe victimization is legitimate, it risks losing its very identity. Such is the imbroglio that confronts Alison’s ecclesiology. In the end, Alison seems caught between competing theological claims. While he lauds Girard for creating a boundary-less church, it seems he uses Girard to gerrymander the boundaries around a new group of people. This time, however, those who are “victimizers” are on the outside. Unfortunately, castigating a new group of people in such a fashion simply perpetuates the very exclusionary practices Alison condemns.

2.B.2. Walter Wink

Walter Wink has found Girard a coworker in the process of dismantling the sacred sanctioning of violence. In particular, he thinks Girard’s theory of mimetic conflict helps explain the presence of violence in the world. At the same time, his appropriation of Girard seems to follow more along the lines of Schwager. He sees the cross causing reconciliation between humans and the divine, not because God needs to be pacified with humans but rather because

---

249 Alison, *Being Wrong*, 115.
250 Girard, at least, seems wary of falling into this trap. See Girard, *I See Satan*, 158.
humans need to be reconciled to God. The cross is “violence directed at the very heart of God” and therefore demonstrates human recalcitrance against and rivalry with God in the extreme.\textsuperscript{251} Despite the hatred and invectives hurled at him, Jesus’ approach to the cross is one of resolution that successfully avoids succumbing to the thinking of the persecutors either in believing that he was guilty of his crime or needing to utilize violence in order to attain victory over his opponents.\textsuperscript{252}

Although Wink agrees with Girard a great deal, he is reluctant to maintain Girard’s rather optimistic view of the New Testament’s ability to deconstruct sacrificial theology. Not only does he think that the early Christians suppressed the illumination of the innocent scapegoat, but they reified sacrificial theology. In the New Testament, Jesus becomes the ultimate scapegoat, and the Jews become liable for his death.\textsuperscript{253} In addition, Wink notes that the sacrificial interpretation of the death of Christ is much more widespread in the New Testament than Girard admits. While he lists some of the Last Supper passages as examples, he does little to explain what should be done with such passages.\textsuperscript{254} The lack of articulation on this point suggests that they are to be dismissed since they encapsulate the sacrificial theology that doggedly ensnares humanity from embracing nonviolence. Alongside of these differences, Wink also questions several of Girard’s conclusions concerning the pervasiveness of scapegoats in mythic literature as well as Girard’s historical reconstruction of human culture and violence with such little evidence to support the conclusions, despite their appeal.\textsuperscript{255} Thus, although he adopts Girard’s reading of Christ as the innocent victim who reveals the senselessness of human violence, he does not adopt Girard uncritically.

\textsuperscript{251} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 144, 152.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid., 151.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., 153-4.
At the same time, Wink himself has been criticized for inconsistently sanctioning some violent means of opposition, even though he refuses to condone outright physical violence.\textsuperscript{256} For instance, he still endorses the use of “coercion” which “aims at converting the opponent.”\textsuperscript{257} While this coercion is never supposed to cross over into actual physical assault on other people, it seems that such actions are not entirely without “violence” at least in the sense that it involves the imposition of one’s will upon another. Whether this imperils his project is still an open question, but it does demonstrate that the definition of “violence” varies in meaning among the various authors.

2.B.3. S. Mark Heim

In \textit{Saved from Sacrifice}, Heim delivers one of the most thorough adoptions of Girard’s soteriology to date. Though he claims to limit his discussion to how the cross provides liberation from interpersonal violence, his work ventures beyond the initial strictures he claims to have set for himself.\textsuperscript{258} In a very meticulous fashion, Heim works his way through the labyrinth of modern questions about the viability of Christ’s cross as a saving event and shows how a Girardian perspective helps to answer these questions. In short, the work constructs a way to acknowledge, on the one hand, the saving efficacy of Jesus’ violent crucifixion while rejecting the divine origin of this violence on the other hand. As Heim notes on numerous occasions,


\textsuperscript{257} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 192. Although Wink concedes that his nonviolent resistance is coercive, he still avows that it is nonviolent. At stake in the disavowal of violence is a question of what exactly constitutes violence. Boersma affirms that all forms of coercion are violent (“Violence,” 57). If Boersma’s definition is correct, then what justifies certain responses to evil (even Wink’s moderate coercion) is not the nature of the action but the goal or intentions of such actions.

\textsuperscript{258} S. Mark Heim, \textit{Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 9.
Girard’s reading of the Gospels solves the paradoxical presentation of the crucifixion as a thing that benefits Jesus’ followers all the while being something that should have never happened.\(^{259}\)

To begin, Heim acknowledges the presence of atonement theology in the Gospels, but asserts that “it is Jesus’ antagonists who view his death as a redemptive sacrifice, one life given for many.”\(^{260}\) Interestingly, he avoids the Last Supper sayings almost entirely, only briefly providing a single line gloss on the Last Supper sayings: “Jesus’ ‘new covenant’ in his blood is an end to the justification for shedding blood.”\(^{261}\) The rationale for this interpretation is never given. However, if the Last Supper sayings do point to some kind of sacrificial atonement theology, Heim’s assertions that only the antagonists believe in redemptive sacrifice would have to be overturned by the fact that such implications fall from Jesus’ own lips. The Eucharist, though, is supposed to function as a substitute for normal human sacrificial practices, which likewise reconcile the community together.\(^{262}\) In other words, the Eucharist now delivers the same reconciliatory effects without the lynching of a victim.

On the surface, Heim’s treatise seems to answer all of the problems of those who have desired to distance themselves from the divine violence inherent in Christian soteriology. However, buried in a footnote, Heim alludes to the Achilles heel of Girardian soteriology: in order to be the scapegoat that exposes the irrationality of human violence, Jesus must choose to become “an accomplice of Satan in something that is unqualifiedly evil.”\(^{263}\) God, in order to

\(^{259}\) Ibid., 108.
\(^{260}\) Ibid., 125. For evidence, he points to John 11:45-53 and the reconciliation between Pilate and Herod.
\(^{261}\) Ibid., 231.
\(^{262}\) Ibid., 236.
\(^{263}\) Ibid., 153, n. 12. Such an admission sounds reminiscent of Gregory of Nyssa’s soteriology in which God employs deception in order to trick the devil. See Gregory of Nyssa, “The Great Catechism,” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.*, vol. 5 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 24. Schwager seems to potentially circumnavigate this issue. However, to accomplish this, he exchanges an overtly Girardian soteriology for a more general nonviolent view of the atonement wherein Christ wills the transformation of the evil in the cross, not the evil itself. At the same time, it is difficult not to see the divine will somehow complicit in the violence against Christ. While Schwager
attain human salvation, must join paths, even if for a moment, with the devil. For Heim, and Girard as well, this means that God must participate in the very system that he is trying to overturn.\textsuperscript{264} What justifies God’s participation in this regard is the future goal and result of this endeavor. If taken to heart, this admission by Heim means that Girard’s theory does not emancipate God from being complicit in the violence at the cross but permits it as a means to an end.

The resurrection does play an important part in Heim’s soteriology because the vindication of Jesus affirms the spurious nature of the charges against Jesus, declaring his innocence.\textsuperscript{265} At the same time, the resurrection also makes the cross an effective exposition of human violence. The human impetus to suppress the cries of their innocent victims means that only an invincibly innocent victim could really challenge our adherence to the system. The resurrection therefore indubitably proves Jesus’ innocence.\textsuperscript{266} In addition, Heim makes the resurrection the causal event that effects our justification. While our sin implicates us in the lynching of Christ, the fact that he lives means that we cannot be held responsible for his death

\textsuperscript*{264} The same critique is directed at Girard in Stephen Finlan, \textit{Problems with Atonement: The Origins of and Controversy about the Atonement Doctrine} (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2005), 93; cf. B. Keith Putt, “Violent Imitation or Compassionate Repetition?: Girard and Caputo on Exemplary Atonement,” in \textit{Religion and Violence in a Secular World: Toward a New Political Theology}, ed. Clayton Crockett (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 40-1. Girard, though, is a bit more ambiguous in this regard. For example, at one point he writes, “There is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that God causes the mob to come together against Jesus. Violent contagion is enough” (Girard, \textit{I See Satan}, 21). However, a few pages later he writes, “In the case of Jesus, other factors entered in which keep us from seeing him as a victim of chance in the same sense as most of the victims of this type” (Ibid., 25). This at least suggests that the contagion’s selection of Christ was not entirely random. He admits later that if the mimetic cycle is to be revealed and broken “… it must first occur, and in order to occur, it must be unanimous or near-unanimous” (Ibid., 124). Ironically, this necessity of violence against Jesus in order to win peace and salvation for the many is overlooked by many of Girard’s followers.

\textsuperscript*{265} Heim, \textit{Saved from Sacrifice}, 127.

\textsuperscript*{266} Ibid., 197.
since the victim is no longer dead. The only way to avoid forgiveness is to refuse to admit one’s guilt.\textsuperscript{267}

Although the bulk of the work focuses on interpersonal relationships, Heim is able to appropriate Girard in a way that speaks to our reconciliation with the divine. However, he makes it clear that the reconciliation with the divine happens because humans are first rescued from their violent sacrificial tendencies, which puts us at odds with God.\textsuperscript{268} Thus, our rescue from bondage is the condition upon which the relationship with the divine is restored. In fact, it reveals that God has chosen to accept humanity in spite of its moral failings. Likewise, Heim argues that Christ’s death results in forgiveness for all sins in general, even though the primary sin forgiven at the cross is sacrificial violence. In order to do this, Heim labels all other forms of sin as “tributary to sacrifice in that they sow the conflicts that flower in social crisis and lead to redemptive violence.”\textsuperscript{269} Whether all sins do in fact have sacrifice as their intrinsic telos is something worth exploring further, but it at least begs an analysis of sin within the Christian tradition.

Heim’s work is robust and intricately argued. At the same time, his thesis, or at least his hope, that Girardian soteriology can help theologians affirm the salvific nature of the cross with tradition while agreeing with critics of atonement that the violence of the cross should not be condoned, seems to run into a conflict when it acknowledges that God must dance with evil one fateful time in order to secure salvation for humanity. Furthermore, his lack of attention to the

\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 147.
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 320. Here he writes, “I unequivocally advocate a reversal of polarity in our common theology of the cross. We are not reconciled with God and each other by a sacrifice of innocent suffering offered to God. We are reconciled with God because God at the cost of suffering rescued us from bondage to a practice of violent sacrifice that otherwise would keep up estranged, making us enemies of the God who stands with our victims.”
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid., 321-2.
Last Supper sayings means that there are important passages that have not informed his understanding of the cross and might call it into question.

2.B.4. Anthony Bartlett

Like Heim, Bartlett adopts Girardian thought in a circumspect manner. While some have criticized Girard for meshing science and biblical faith into a monstrous hybrid, Bartlett attempts to keep the discourse of scientific research and that of the biblical narrative distinct, preferring to employ the biblical narrative as the primary mode of entry into mimetic theory.270 In addition, although Girard focuses on the negative power of mimesis that is revealed by the Gospel, Bartlett successfully moves past Girard to a “redemptive anthropology” through Christ that not only reveals the human problem but also points the way beyond the problems Girard identifies.271 Faulting Girard’s soteriology for potentially being just “information,” Bartlett seeks to channel mimetic anthropology into a direction where Christ’s death opens up a path to mimetic transformation wherein humans are not just saved from something (so Girard) but in which humans are freed for something.272 Instead of being simply the impartation of knowledge, for Bartlett, the cross is the moment when God enters the “abyss” of human experience. For him this experience of God entering the abyss has both existential and philosophical implications. On the existential side, it means God has infiltrated the violent context of humanity, experiencing its loneliness and isolation, which culminates in the cross. On the philosophical side, it means God manifested himself in a world where deconstruction has shorn the metaphysical grounding

---

271 Ibid., 40.
272 Ibid., 13.
from beneath its feet.\(^{273}\) In essence, the abyss is the world without philosophical foundations. In this abyss, the cross pours forth compassion in response to human violence and meaninglessness. This demonstration of compassion invites humans to mimetic transformation where they turn from the hostility of the world to an unselfish movement toward others.\(^{274}\) Taking up Kierkegaardian repetition, he suggests that the cross is a moment of invitation to conversion, to be repeated throughout one’s life where one desists from violence and exclusion.\(^{275}\) As he explains, “It is a dream of the enemy as friend,” which beckons one to enter a radically different reality.\(^{276}\) This movement entails a loss of one’s self, which is the essence of what happens at the cross. Interestingly, when it comes to the question of the necessity of the cross, Bartlett sides with Girard against Schwager and Alison. Bartlett argues against any kind of “necessity” compelling God’s offer of himself in the cross, asserting that any kind of necessity erases compassion altogether and the likelihood that such an action would result in human

---

\(^{273}\) Ibid., 18-27. David Eagle champions Bartlett’s construction of an atonement theory apart from metaphysics. See David E. Eagle, “Anthony Bartlett’s Concept of Abyssal Compassion and the Possibility of a Truly Nonviolent Atonement,” Conrad Grebel Review 24 no. 1 (2006): 66-81. According to Eagle, the departure from a metaphysical understanding means that one can no longer locate “objective content” in the atonement and every moment that presents itself is immediately lost in the past. As a result, one can never capture a particular moment in time because “… to speak of the original event is impossible” (Ibid., 70). If this is true, then once an event—in this case the cross—occurs, it will be forever lost and irrecoverable. Though Eagle denies that anything was objectively accomplished by the cross (e.g. God was satisfied), his descriptions of the cross assume that something objectively occurred and that one can access this event, even if it is the event of deconstruction. He writes: “… the cross is God’s descent into our liminal space that disrupts all attempts to fix the present” (Ibid., 71). If it is “impossible” to speak of the foundational event, namely the cross, then not only is this event lost forever but one is precluded from speaking of its effects as well.

\(^{274}\) Bartlett, Cross Purposes, 39.

\(^{275}\) Ibid., 150. He does note that he is going a good deal beyond Kierkegaard at this point. In taking up the notion of repetition, though, he is avoiding a potential weakness in Girard where one might overlook the fact that imitating Christ requires “nonidentical repetition” in order to preserve the uniqueness of Christ and also to avoid a new form of mimetic rivalry. See James Fodor, “Christian Discipleship as Participative Imitation: Theological Reflections on Girardian Themes,” in Violence Renounced, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press, 2000), 261-2.

\(^{276}\) Bartlett, Cross Purposes, 157.
transformation via mimesis. Thus, Christ’s death offers the pattern that is to be made ever new in the lives of his followers.

The resurrection, although minimally developed, is an essential piece to his understanding of atonement as the offer of forgiveness and love in the human abyss. Unlike other resurrections, he notes that Christ’s does not obfuscate the victimization, but rather affirms its reality and responds with forgiveness instead of violence. In the end, it affirms that all violence is forgiven. In addition he clarifies that the resurrection “is not a transcendent miracle vindicating Christ against his human history” but is instead an “affirmation of the anthropological revolution of the cross.” The resurrection does not necessarily add anything new, but it does provide affirmation that God does not return violence for violence. Like other followers of Girard, the reason why the resurrection should be seen as authentic is “precisely the abyssal love of Jesus in response to the acute crisis of violence that brought his end.” In other words, the authenticity of the resurrection is located in its ability to demonstrate the radically different message through Christ’s pouring out of love at the cross.

Although Bartlett does adopt Girard’s basic hermeneutics of the cross, he does criticize Girard’s lack of assessment of Christian history. For example, he faults Girard for basically allowing Christendom to escape the withering criticisms of his analyses. He writes that Girard:

… fails to see through the radical consequences of his own thought, what might be termed the deconstructive potential of the cross, both in respect of inherited Christian traditions that petrify the Gospels themselves within a sacred system and, more essentially, in respect of the profoundly challenging, humanly re-creative effect of the Crucified.

---

277 Ibid., 24, 224, 251. He makes the erroneous claim that Schwager is still working within “the cultural residue of a God characterized by violence” because he incorporates the language of necessity (Ibid., 225).
278 Ibid., 153-4.
279 Ibid., 154.
280 Ibid.
281 Ibid., 14; cf. 40. It should be noted that Girard at least hinted at this reality, even if he did not trace it out with the specificity one finds in Bartlett (Girard, Things Hidden, 225). More to the point, though, Girard notes
In a rather provocative reading of the history of soteriology, Bartlett argues that Christian
teology from Irenaeus to Luther has drunk deeply from the wells of Gnosticism and
Marcionism.\footnote{Bartlett, \textit{Cross Purposes}, 50-94.} He contends that whereas the Gnostics bifurcated good and evil into two
separate gods, Irenaeus explained the same phenomena through pitting God against his mimetic
opponent, Satan. When Anselmian atonement theology moves past the conflict between God
and a metaphysical Satan, the forces of good and evil are now fused in God with the result that
God must punish his Son to maintain his honor.\footnote{Ibid., 86. Of course, for this reading of Christian history to be true, one must posit a strongly
demarcated origin for penal theories. As some have pointed out, the origin of penal elements in atonement theory
began within the first few centuries of the church, thus challenging the perspective Bartlett provides. See Hans
Boersma, \textit{Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition} (Grand Rapids: Baker
Academic, 2004), 158-63.} Luther, he avers, simply makes the internal
dichotomy within God more egregious. The upshot of this reading of Christian history is to
make the various penal theories of the atonement the intellectual descendants of the Gnostic
dualists. The one bright spot in the development of soteriology through the middle ages appears
to be Abelard, whom he credits with adopting a mimetic soteriology “that has forfeited all
exchange.”\footnote{Ibid., 87. One can take umbrage with Bartlett’s unreserved endorsement of Abelard. On the one hand,
he is certainly correct to detect a mimetic soteriology present in Abelard. However, to proclaim Abelard free of any
notion of exchange does not follow. In Abelard’s \textit{Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans}, a system of exchange
is still present because humans must fulfill the law through love in order to be justified. Although Abelard’s
interpretation of the cross does not produce any necessary purchase on God, when Christ’s model of love fosters the
same in the human heart leading them to fulfill the law, humans then have a purchase on God and are worthy of the
reward at the judgment. See Abelard, \textit{Epistle to the Romans}, 65, 78, 81, 111-2.}

\begin{quote}
that to go as far as Bartlett does here is to reify the same pattern of condemnation and exclusion, but this time
against a new target: Christianity. See Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 245.
\end{quote}
suggests both derive from ancient sacrificial theology.\textsuperscript{285} He writes, “the militarization of the cross and its interpretation as satisfaction arise via the figure of Christ as warrior-hero, which at root is a formulation out of mimetic violence.”\textsuperscript{286} By linking Anselm’s soteriology with the Crusades through a common cultural ancestor, Barlett indicts both as contrary to the Gospel.

When Bartlett turns to the New Testament in the final portion of his book, he boldly states that, despite differing interpretations, any notion of an exchange at the cross is “highly prejudicial” and results from a culture that erroneously embraces the notion of sacred violence rather than deriving from the actual texts themselves.\textsuperscript{287} When dealing with the possible sacrificial theology in the Gospels, he treats the Last Supper sayings and the ransom sayings together, and interprets the Last Supper sayings through the prism of the ransom sayings. To support this exegetical move, he points to Luke’s Gospel, which does not use the word “ransom,” but has a similar form of the saying following the Eucharist (Luke 22:24-27). In light of this maneuver, he concludes “… the Eucharistic institution is interpreted in terms of abyssal service rather than cultic sacrifice, and precisely over against an anthropology modeled in the image of kings, lords, great ones, and mimetic desire in relation to their power….\textsuperscript{288} For the most part, it seems Luke’s deletion of the notion of ransom is taken as indicative of how the ransom sayings should be interpreted in Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28 as well, namely, as lacking any kind of cultic reference. For support, he draws on two Old Testament antecedents of ransom. The first is a connection between the notion of ransom and the money that is paid in exchange for damage of life or property in the Old Testament. This notion of exchange for life is augmented by the

\textsuperscript{285} Bartlett, \textit{Cross Purposes}, 142. Both come from cultural forces and not the biblical narrative, according to him: “Rather, the identification of violence with the Christian concept of God derives from the primal construction of the sacred and its pervasive cultural force. In the light of this position all the lingering affection for the Anselmian scheme may be seen as an unwillingness at some level to let go of the metaphysical sanction of violence.”

\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 96.

\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 189.

\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., 212.
second, which is basically the Old Testament depiction of God as the kinsman redeemer who rescues his people. Pulling these Old Testament antecedents together to interpret the ransom offered by the Son of Man in Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:20, Bartlett explains these sayings as “a statement of divine solidarity working a redemption from the consequences of human violence and death rather than of a divine anger from which God also strangely redeems.”

Thus, the ransom is God’s redemption of humans from themselves and their patterns of violence.

Because the ransom sayings are interpreted apart from a notion of God needing the Son’s death to be reconciled to humanity, the Last Supper sayings are interpreted in the same manner. His interpretation of the Last Supper sayings further incorporates N.T. Wright’s argument that Jesus was embodying the story of Israel and recasting it through his actions of cleansing the Temple and the Last Supper. In fact, he depends on Wright quite heavily throughout his treatment of the Last Supper sayings. When it comes to explaining the meaning of Matthew’s description of Christ’s blood as shed “for the forgiveness of sins,” he quotes from N.T. Wright: “Matthew is not suggesting that Jesus’ death will accomplish an abstract atonement, but that it will be the means of rescuing YHWH’s people from their exilic plight.” In citing this portion from Wright, Bartlett suggests that Wright’s view is in concert with his own, but fails to note that by repudiating an “abstract atonement” Wright is not jettisoning atonement altogether. In fact, if Bartlett had been more attentive to Wright’s larger argument he would have seen that Wright still views some kind of atonement theology operative in the Gospels. After meandering his way through Second Temple texts, Wright observes that the redemptive suffering of the righteous could function as a substitute for the suffering of the entire nation. Israel, being in the state of exile as a result of her sin, needed her suffering alleviated, and a righteous sufferer could

---

289 Ibid., 215.
290 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 561. This is quoted in Bartlett, Cross Purposes, 218.
purportedly benefit others with his death. Contrary to how he is portrayed by Bartlett, Wright concludes: “It is not going beyond the evidence, then, to suggest that Jesus saw his own approaching death in terms of the sacrificial cult.”292 As a result, Bartlett fails to read Wright closely enough to realize that Wright is not taking umbrage with a notion of sacrifice but with a soteriology that divorces Jesus from his concrete historical context within the larger story of Israel.

In the end, Bartlett’s study takes Girardian soteriology to new specificity in its understanding of sanctification and fleshes out a fuller picture of imitating Christ. This alone constitutes a substantial contribution to Girardian scholarship. Additionally, Bartlett offers a provocative portrait of the history of Christian theology from a Girardian perspective that creatively traces how Christian theologians have attempted to deal with God and violence, though some will question his ability to advance some of the claims. With that being said, his treatment of the Last Supper sayings seems inadequate. He never utters a word about the allusions to the covenantal sacrifice on Sinai, which put the sacrificial metaphor front and center in the Last Supper sayings, a metaphor which would further support the view of Wright that Jesus interpreted his death in light of the sacrificial cult.

2.B.5. Other Criticisms of Girard

Though Girard has been championed and adopted by various theologians, given his vast oeuvre and influence in academic thought, Girard has also drawn his share of criticism regarding each of the major points of his thesis from philosophers and systematic theologians. For example, the initial step in his explanation of the human problem, namely, that all desire is

292 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 605.
mimetic, has been challenged, even though recent studies in neuroscience ostensibly support aspects of his mimetic theory. Others, like Robert Cohn, have argued that Girard fails to account for the various dimensions of desire that humans have, ranging from physical urges to desires for transcendence. In other words, humans possess various desires, which find their origin in our biological needs rather than simply in another human model as Girard insists. Thus, some have contested Girard’s account of human desire.

Others have contended that Girard’s equation of sacrifice—the act that diffuses pent up mimetic angst—with violence is misguided. John Dunnill has argued that Girard unnecessarily forces all primitive sacrifices to be of one mold, in short a projection of human violence. In contrast, Dunnill argues that sacrifices often possess a positive dimension and are more akin to the offer of a gift rather than Girard’s equation with murder. Additionally, others have questioned whether all physical violence should be considered evil. Hans Boersma, for example, observes that, despite Girard’s valorization of the victims, by precluding any resort to violence—for both victims and those who might try to ameliorate the victims’ plight—“we inadvertently give violence free reign.” As such, there is no way of stymieing the onslaught of violence

---

297 Douglas Hedley, Sacrifice Imagined: Violence, Atonement, and the Sacred (London: Continuum, 2011), 227. In this same trajectory, Douglas Hedley has also contended that sacrifice cannot be equated with violence because “the higher forms of religion … see the point of sacrifice in the transformation of the crude selfish ego, the source of division and strife into a vehicle of Divine love.”
298 Boersma, Violence, 151. As Girard, writes, the opposite of violence cannot be good violence but “total abstention from all violence.” See Girard, Theater of Envy, 216. However, there are times when Girard, in what
apart from calling for a conversion in most of Girard’s thought, and the right to defend oneself seems dismissed in much of Girard’s work. Similarly, Rowan Williams suggests that love itself involves what might be perceived as violence and that Girard’s unequivocal negation of all violence overlooks the form that love might take in a non-ideal world. Thus, scholars have also contested Girard’s ability to equate sacrifice with violence and violence with evil.

Girard’s thesis has also been questioned about its claims regarding the uniqueness of Christianity. Observant scholars have identified elements of mimetic theory and examples of innocent victims in various places in ancient literature like the Orphic tradition, Homer’s *Iliad*, Socrates, and the Epic of Gilgamesh among others. In light of this evidence, Leo Lefebure contends that the Scriptures of the Judeo-Christian tradition were not birthed in a contradiction of the main thrust of his thought, seems to allow for the use of “good violence,” which will be noted in the final chapter.

---


300 Lucien Scubla, “The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion,” in Violence and Truth, ed. Paul Dumouchel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 163. Girard has countered these claims by Scubla, saying that Scubla’s claim “is only partially true” since the Orphic tradition “is very incomplete and fragmentary, and it simply did not change the world because it was purely doctrinal and contained no equivalent of the four accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion.” Cited from Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 212. Girard also suggests that Orphism was indirectly influenced by the Bible itself. To support his claim of indirect influence from the biblical tradition he cites the following studies: Giuseppe Fornari, “Labyrinthhe Strategies of Sacrifice: The Cretans by Euripides,” *Contagion* 4 (1997): 163-88; idem, Fra Dioniso e Cristo: La Sapienza sacrificale greca e la civiltà occidentale (Bologna: Pitagora, 2001). See Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 229, n. 21.

301 According to Bailie, the *Iliad* exposes the inanity of violence and mimetic rivalry, even if “defenseless love” is never prescribed as the panacea for violence, as it is in the biblical texts. Gil Bailie, “Sacrificial Violence in Homer’s *Iliad*,” in Curing Violence, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1994), 70.

302 As a result of the various representatives of nonviolent resistance found outside Christianity, like Socrates, Mark Wallace has called for a broader sense of revelation that would include other demonstrations of non-sacrificial violence. See Mark I. Wallace “Postmodern Biblicism: the Challenge of René Girard for Contemporary Theology,” *Modern Theology* 5 (1989): 318-23.

vacuum but emerged in conjunction with other Ancient Near Eastern theological advancements. Although Lefebure affirms God’s revelation in Christ is unique, he argues that it is false to assume that revelation requires some kind of exclusive uniqueness, which is solely the possession of Christianity. Consequently, Girard does not deny that insights into scapegoating are present in other religions. In his lecture series published in the volume, *Sacrifice*, Girard evaluated the Vedic tradition and credits the Brahmanas with understanding mimetic rivalry better than much of the Western tradition. At the same time, Girard identifies places where the adherence to sacrifice and its logic still remains firmly entrenched in the Vedas. In light of this, Girard concedes the presence of revelation in other traditions without surrendering the uniqueness of the biblical revelation. For him, the uniqueness of Christianity lies in the fullness of revelation, and Girard ends his lectures reiterating this point firmly.

Another charge that has been brought against Girard is that the New Testament Gospels are not as non-sacrificial as Girard purports. In support of this point, critics point out that Jesus commands people to offer sacrifices and even participate in the Passover festival like many of his contemporaries. Moreover, the fact that Christ’s death is set within the context of the Passover and even portrayed as a Passover sacrifice shows that sacrificial terminology, if not

---

304 For support, he argues that the Egyptian *Tale of Two Brothers* is likely the source behind the Joseph narrative and that the transition from henotheism to monotheism in Second Isaiah was roughly coterminal with shifts towards monotheism in other contemporaneous religions. Leo D. Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 30-1, 39. One can also point to Goodhart’s contention that being a Girardian does not necessitate one’s allegiance to Christianity, but could be taken up in a host of other religious and philosophical traditions. See Goodhart, *Prophetic Law*, xxix-xxxii.

305 Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence*, 31, 47. As a result of these observations, he argues that inter-religious dialogue is a part of the biblical tradition and is therefore not undermining the distinctives of the tradition.


307 Ibid., 62-95.

308 Scubla, “René Girard,” 162-3. Insightfully, he points out something that appropriators of Girard often fail to notice, namely, that the Essenes are the truly anti-sacrificial party in first century Judaism. However, I would hasten to point out that this is not because they disagree with sacrificial practices as such but rather their repudiation of sacrifice is rooted in their dispute with the priesthood in charge. When the correct priests were in control, the Essenes would be just as sacrificial as the other Jews of the day.
sacrificial theology, needs to be acknowledged. Similarly, Cheryl McGuire has argued that the messianic ideology of Second Temple Judaism included a strain of “sacred violence” in its expectation of future purification. In casting Jesus as a Messiah, she concludes the Gospels place Jesus in this same violent realm of meaning and symbolism. As a result, critics point out that Girard’s univocal reading of the Gospels in a non-sacrificial way fails to acknowledge the elements that challenge his thesis. Although theologians have identified the Last Supper sayings as part of the Gospels that possibly obviate Girard’s thesis, to my knowledge none have made a full exegesis of the passages as they relate to Girard’s argument.

The novelty and uniqueness of Girard’s thesis has also raised questions regarding his orthodoxy on several accounts. Christoph Schroeder accuses Girard of Marcionism because there seems to be a distinction between the God of the Old Testament, who sanctions human violence, and the God of the New Testament, who supports the persecuted. Unfortunately, Schroeder’s critique of Girard seems unfounded since it is based only on Girard’s book on Job. In his defense, Girard does see the Old and New Testaments depicting a similar story of

---

309 Scubla, “René Girard,” 168-9. Although Scubla sees the Last Supper sayings as important in demonstrating a sacrificial reading of Christ’s death in the Gospels, he does not highlight their connections with the covenant sacrifice of Exodus 24, nor does he fully extrapolate their theological implications.


311 For a list of such passages, see Wink, Engaging the Powers, 153.

312 Christoph Schroeder, “‘Standing in the Breach’: Turning away the Wrath of God,” Int 52, 1 (1998): 17. Girard repudiates Marcionism in a later writing: See Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 218. Although Girard thinks the Old Testament picture of God is fused with archaic notions, they are required in the progressive nature of revelation completed in the Gospels. Further vindication for Girard from this charge can be seen in his critique of Pascal that Old Testament prophecy can only be unlocked by the hermeneutic of Christ. By suggesting that mimetic interpretation is a better hermeneutic key, he says that the meaning of Old Testament prophecy is open for Jew and Christian alike (Girard, I See Satan, 129).

313 See Girard, Job.
one God, identifying continuity between the testaments rather than the sharp demarcation Schroeder posits in Girard.314

Still, others have accused Girard for slipping into Gnosticism.315 Complicating this criticism is the fact that the various interlocutors, including Girard himself, appear to be using different elements of Gnosticism to either indict or exculpate Girard from such a charge. Some note—and seemingly with good reason—that Girard’s soteriology resembles the esoteric gnostis
that was reserved for those privileged to receive the illumination with the only difference being that, in Girard’s case, his rigorous hermeneutics have finally unlocked the hidden treasure of knowledge. Since Girard’s soteriology places Christendom under its judgment, theologians like Boersma ask how the church can miss the true meaning of the cross for two millennia.316 In the

course of the discussions in Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World, one of the interlocutors queried Girard about the novelty of Girard’s reading of the biblical texts. He seemed to brush aside the issue and simply replied, “... we are searching for coherence in the text, and I believe that we are finding it.”317 Such an anemic rebuttal fails to explain why the church has misinterpreted the Gospels to date. In an interview recorded in The Girard Reader,

---

314 Girard, however, avers there is continuity between the testaments in more recent works. See Girard, I See Satan, 123; idem, Evolution and Conversion, 205-6; and idem, Scapegoat, 103. Boersma, who argues that Girard imperils the continuity between the testaments, seems reticent to go as far as Schroeder in this regard. See Boersma, Hospitality, 140.


316 Boersma makes the issue more acute by saying that Girard is forced to admit that his interpretation has remained hidden from the church’s explicit articulation of the Gospel while he simultaneously argues that the western move to support the victim is precisely an outgrowth of the Gospel. Basically, he observes that Girard wants to hold to the notion that the Church has misinterpreted the Gospel while also arguing that the same misinterpreted Gospel has truly had a leavening effect upon western culture. See Boersma, Hospitality, 149.

317 Girard, Things Hidden, 210. Girard suggests that early Christianity had some form of “intuition” about his hypothesis, though he concedes that such an intuition was not explicit for them. See Ibid., 219, 435, 439.
Girard was also questioned regarding the novelty of his view. While he responded by saying it “is found in many passages in the writings of the church fathers,” he failed to identify any specific authors or passages to substantiate his claim. At best, he could point to individuals who have endorsed nonviolent behavior as appropriators of his theology. However, endorsing nonviolent behavior is still a bit different from articulating Girard’s soteriology of the scapegoat. In fact, the only personality he marshals for explicit support of his interpretation is Nietzsche who denigrated Christianity’s concern for the victim as a repugnant weakness. If Girard’s soteriology manages to lie undiscovered throughout the history of Christendom and can only be unveiled in our current context, one can perhaps see a certain Gnostic quality in the esoteric nature of Girard’s soteriology.

If, however, one takes the charge of Gnosticism to refer to Girard’s soteriology being simply an impartation of knowledge, he seems to fair much better. In Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World, one sees evidence that Girard’s understanding of soteriology comprises an objective change in the world. He notes that the transition from the form of revelation contained in the Old Testament to that of the Gospels “is not an exclusively intellectual development…. A historical moment comes about that was never possible before, a moment in which there can only be an absolute and conscious choice” between participating in sacrificial violence or in imitating the Father in love. In spite of the cross being a revelation of human

318 Girard, Girard Reader, 272.
319 Ibid., 273. This argument fails to be compelling since there are many different ways in which a theology could support nonviolence. It does not, for instance, have to evacuate the cross of any penal element to support nonviolent human behavior.
320 Ibid., 273. He does suggest, without any explicit identification, that some of the church fathers and anyone between the Gospels and Nietzsche who lived “as nonviolently as possible” would “have understood” the Gospel in a similar fashion “though not necessarily intellectually.”
321 One could perhaps make a rebuttal on this point. Just as the Old Testament was the necessary precursor to the delivery of the saving revelation, one could say that Christendom and its endorsement of atonement theology was the necessary precursor for the western world to be ready for its reception. Girard, Things Hidden, 252-4.
322 Ibid., 201 (emphasis is mine).
anthropology, this revelation changes the world and humanity by offering a new way of being human that was impossible before. A few pages later, he affirms that the objective change in the world birthed by the cross thrusts human history past a point of no return. Now that the truth has been uncovered, the repeating cycles of disorder producing new forms of order and culture through victims can no longer continue unabated. Consequently, by affirming an ontological change in the world occurring at the Christ event, Girard shows that his soteriology is not simply the impartation of esoteric knowledge.

In the end, Girard seems to distance himself from much of what it means to be “Gnostic.” Girard himself has repudiated the charge of Gnosticism by pointing out that he affirms the reality of the cross, which Gnosticism with its repudiation of the material world denies. Since Girard affirms the value and reality of the material world, it is hard to categorize him as “Gnostic.” If the label is to be applied at all, it can only be done so in very precise instances where Girard resembles aspects—and never the sum total—of the Gnostics, like promulgating an esoteric doctrine that departs from the larger Christian tradition.

Additionally, some scholars have noted that Girard could potentially be categorized as a Pelagian because the transformation of humans seems to be almost, if not entirely, a rational affair with little divine assistance, though Girard would certainly consider the gift of revelation

---

323 Ibid., 206. He writes, “From now on, it becomes impossible to put the clock back. There is an end to cyclical history, for the very reason that its mechanisms are beginning to be uncovered.”

324 See Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 219. Schwager does attempt to exculpate Girard from these charges by noting that Girard affirms the two natures of Christ, the Spirit’s ministry among humans, and the saving effects of the cross. Nevertheless, Schwager does not attempt to explain why this view of the cross has not only been “hidden since the foundation of the world,” but hidden since the foundation of the church as well. See Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 110. Alison also repudiates the Gnostic charge. While he concedes the fact that knowledge is essential (i.e. the intelligence of the victim) to his soteriology, such knowledge is a necessary foundation for one to become “constitutive and creative of a new human reality. That is to say, as humans come to perceive the reality of God as victim and of humans as victimizers … so we are impelled to the construction of a different form of social other, one built from the self-giving victim, rather than one built by exclusion of the victim” (Alison, *Being Wrong*, 84). In addition to this, Alison also notes that Girardian soteriology is inherently historical, which is antithetical to Gnosticism (Ibid., 232). If anything, Alison seems to historicize salvation at times, so one is left wondering if there is salvation possible beyond earthly life (Ibid., 239).
an act of grace. Such critics note there is a striking void when it comes to issues of assisting or transforming grace. To be fair to Girard and his critics, references to grace and its role in transformation have emerged in Girard’s works, though infrequently and more recently. His more recent works have begun to hint at aspects of Christ being the ideal model, which is another dimension of grace. However, Girard’s articulation of grace faces tension with other statements. For example, Girard seems to write as if the process of conversion does not require an internal work of grace, being only a rational realization of one’s violent tendencies. For example, he affirms that humans possess an unfettered ability for conversion: “We are free because we can truly convert ourselves at any time.” In such statements, divine grace does not appear necessary to move the will to desire and choose conversion. On the other hand, there are statements that point in the opposite direction, suggesting that only grace can turn one from a complicit actor in violence to a detractor of it. On the one hand, Girard’s desire to hold human freedom and responsibility as always possible seems to displace any need for grace. Yet, on the other hand, he possesses affirmations that grace exists and can be identified in the process of conversion. The problem with Girard’s notion of grace is not that it is nonexistent. It is simply too ambiguous and undeveloped to be of much use.

Others believe Girard’s soteriology results in an anemic ecclesiology. John Milbank takes umbrage with Girard in this regard because, though Girard offers a salient critique of the

---

326 Adams and Girard, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice,” 25. In this interview with Rebecca Adams, Girard says, “Wherever you have that desire, I would say, that really active, positive desire for the other, there is some kind of divine grace present.”
327 Girard, Battling to the End, 133.
328 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 223.
329 Girard, Girard Reader, 279. He writes, “So the question becomes one of the transformation of the disciples, how they become able to advocate the truth of Christ and the Kingdom of God. This has to occur through the power of grace alone.”
current social order, he fails to provide a positive replacement. Thus, Milbank writes: “Girard does not, in fact, really present us with a theology of two cities, but instead with a story of one city, and its final rejection by a unique individual.”

The upshot of all of this is that Girard’s thought does not allow one to evaluate cultures in degrees of goodness and badness. All cultures receive the negative pronouncement. For Milbank, the lack of a positive social practice leaves one hopelessly floundering in a world of claims competing for veracity. Only a positive picture gives us “means to discriminate peace and truth from their opposites.”

On this point, Milbank has read Girard closely, for Girard seems to make any kind of collective discipleship of Christ next to impossible. While Girard does aver that humans can resist desire, this resistance to mimetic rivalry can only occur in individuals, not communities or cultures. In fact, Girard summarizes Christianity as “the small minority able to resist the crowd.” If Christianity should ever become the crowd, it would become the source of mimetic contagion. Girard further jeopardizes the prospects of a communal following of Christ when he writes, “When Jesus says: ‘scandals must happen’ (Matthew 18.7-8) he is talking about communities. In communities, there are so many people that it would be statistically impossible

---


331 This observation has been further developed by Neil Ormerod who shows that without any kind of normative guide for desires Girard is hard pressed to explain why Jesus is a better mimetic model than another. Without a normative standard, asserting Jesus is a better model is simply degenerating into another form of rivalry. See Neil Ormerod, “Is all Desire Mimetic? Lonergan and Girard on the Nature of Desire and Authenticity,” in Girard’s Mimetic Theory across the Disciplines, vol. 1 of Violence, Desire, and the Sacred, ed. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge (New York: Continuum, 2012), 251-62, esp. 257-8.

332 In agreement here is Jim Fodor who points out that Girard fails to identify concrete actions that embody Christ’s form of being in the world and therefore fails to provide a resource for ecclesiology. See Fodor, “Christian Discipleship,” 249; 266.

333 Milbank, Social Theory, 401. While at the point of Milbank’s writing such criticisms were justified, recent publications by Girard show him moving toward a more positive endorsement of mimesis. Still, Boersma thinks Girard provides an ambivalent and inadequate explanation of how Christ relates to culture when all culture seems rooted in violence. See Boersma, Hospitality, 143-6.

334 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 239. The impossibility of the crowd to avoid mimetic violence makes one wonder how Girard can expect humanity to eventually fully engulf the Christian revelation.
for mimetic violence not to be present, but the individual isn’t bound hand-and-foot to mimetic desire. Jesus himself was not.” Only the individual can be wrested free from the human problem. However, the liberated individuals can never build another community because this will only recreate the mimetic cycle. Instead of forming a culture or community, as Milbank observes, one can only demolish the earthly city to emancipate heavenly individuals. Moreover, if Alison’s conflicted ecclesiology can serve as an example of an ecclesiology traced upon Girardian lines, one can perhaps see why Girard himself has not advanced a positive dimension to his ecclesiology: it simply creates one more basis for inclusion and exclusion.

Finally, Girard’s soteriology has been seen as void of a vertical dimension. There is, after all, little description of how his soteriology affects one’s relationship with the divine. It remains largely a horizontal reconciliation that affects humans and their relationships with one another because it concerns their emancipation from violence. If Girard does incorporate the vertical dimension, it is basically the expulsion of a violent God image, but this still constitutes a change in humans, not in the conditions upon which God relates to humanity.

---

336 Hunsinger suggests that Girard’s soteriology is faulty because “the ‘horizontal’ is emphasized at the expense of the ‘vertical.’” See Hunsinger, “Nonviolent God,” 71.
337 After outlining the views of Girard and Schwager, Balthasar engages a question he deems important: “Why the Cross, if God forgives in any case? The answer given hitherto is unsatisfactory. It concerns only men’s attitude to the Crucified, as if God’s attitude to him did not exist.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Action*, vol. 4 of *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988-1998), 312. Balthasar sees Girard’s soteriology as resulting in only a change for humans, without any kind of reconciliation being necessary with God.
338 This is not to say that Girard is devoid of discussing the vertical relationship with the divine. One can, for instance, point to his caveat in *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*: “Satan turns bad contagion into something I hope not to do myself, a totalitarian and infallible theory that makes the theoretician deaf and blind to the love of God for humankind and to the love that human beings share with God, however imperfectly” (Girard, *I See Satan*, 152). See also, Girard, *Things Hidden*, 152. While one can conclude that Girard does not preclude divine-human reconciliation, such themes are not explicitly developed.
339 Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 216. He writes, “Then God becomes victim in order to free man of the illusion of a violent God, which must be abolished in favour of Christ’s knowledge of his Father.”
340 Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 119. Schwager has attempted to rebut this criticism of Girard by saying that “Jesus’ obedience to his Father and his representation and intercession for sinners are decisive also in this interpretation.” In other words, Jesus’ path to the cross is played out in a posture that mirrors the Father, which Schwager contends involves a vertical dimension. While certainly a helpful qualification to note, Schwager’s
Thus, one is warranted in questioning whether Girard has produced a sufficiently robust soteriology that explains the various dimensions of soteriology.

2.C. Concluding Thoughts: The Present Need

Despite the vast amount of scholarly energy that has been devoted to Girard’s work, there still remains a need to assess whether Girard’s non-sacrificial interpretation of the Gospels can incorporate the Last Supper sayings. Although several of Girard’s appropriators have read them in concert with Girard’s assessment, most of the authors surveyed here ignore particular aspects of the Last Supper sayings that point in the direction of a sacrificial reading. For example, the allusion to the sacrifice on Sinai (“blood of the covenant”) in Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24 is left unaddressed by many. Moreover, despite the rather overt connections with covenantal thought in the Old Testament, most of Girard’s appropriators avoid the inter-canonical connections and their implications for interpreting the Gospels. Few offer explanations as to why Matthew would choose to add the gloss that Christ’s blood is shed “for the forgiveness of sin.” In fact, it seems to be a common strategy that emerges in both Williams and Bartlett to allow the Gospel of Luke, who has putatively less of an emphasis on atonement, to determine the meanings of Mark and Matthew. Such an exegetical decision forces the Synoptics into a uniform mold in order to support a certain exegetical conclusion. Finally, several of Girard’s rebuttal does not adequately explain what the Father is exactly doing at the cross in Girard’s own work. Moreover, what happens in the intercession for sinners is never explained. Does it, for instance, result in an actual change in the Father’s reception of the sinful perpetrators of violence? At best, the obedience to the Father simply means that the actions of the Son are aligned with His will in returning forgiveness for violence. I also find Schwager’s assertion that there is “representation” of sinners in the cross possibly in contradiction to his former argument that Christ cannot be identifying himself with sinners since that would imply, “through identification with their violence against him, he would even have crucified himself.”

341 E.g. Schwager, Williams, Chilton, Heim, and Bartlett.
342 E.g. Schwager, Williams, Hamerton-Kelly, Heim, and Bartlett.
343 E.g. Marlin E. Miller, “Girardian Perspectives and Christian Atonement” in Violence Renounced, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford, Penn.: Pandora, 2000), 38. Ironically, Miller can point to the Last Supper sayings and quotes selectively from them without commenting on the aspects from Matthew where the blood that is poured out is for the forgiveness of sins.
commentators seem to be aware of the challenge that the Last Supper sayings create, but fail to explain how they inform the Gospels’ presentation of the cross. Thus, if Girard’s assertion that the Gospels are truly free of sacrificial theology can continue to be adopted and appropriated by various scholars, there needs to be more direct interaction between Girard’s thesis and the soteriological implications of the Last Supper sayings.

Furthermore, I suggest that the theological subtexts implicit and explicit in the Last Supper sayings could actually be useful in freeing Girard from some of the criticisms that have been leveled against him. For example, the connection between the Last Supper sayings and the covenant would provide an emphasis on the divine-human relationship that seems missing in Girard’s own soteriology. While many of his followers (i.e. Schwager, Heim, etc.) have circumvented this lacuna in other ways, the Last Supper sayings would keep Girard’s reading of the cross from being simply reconciliation among humans. Furthermore, since the covenant is also a revelation of God’s intentions for humankind, the introduction of the covenant would provide resources for a positive ecclesiology that Milbank noted was absent in Girard. Not to be overlooked, the charge that Girardian theory tends to minimize the role of transforming grace and elevate the understanding of esoteric knowledge could also be remedied by pointing to the Lukan/Pauline tradition of the Last Supper with its expectation of the new covenant, which incorporate hopes of the impartation of the divine Spirit as well as the transformation of human beings. Thus, although Girard avoids the Last Supper sayings in his theological formulations, these very passages might open up theological resources that allow him to bypass some of the critiques he has sustained to date.

344 In one of Jim Fodor’s essays, he suggests that Girard’s thought is deficient in its oversight of covenantal themes, and encourages others to augment Girard’s thought as a result. Fodor, “Christian Discipleship,” 255.
Finally, I am not sure that Girardian thought has delivered what many have purported. If the analysis of Alison reveals anything, it is that Girardian soteriology can subtly be turned into new grounds for victimizing others. Moreover, people like Williams still seem forced to allow for the violence of war in order to maintain earthly peace. In addition, a Girardian theology of the cross does not remove God from being complicit or in some sense willing violence upon Jesus as noted by Heim. If anything, God’s complicity in human violence during the cross is seemingly justified, just as God’s deception of the devil is justified in Gregory of Nyssa, in light of the anticipated soteriological end. In this light, it is only fair to say that Girardian soteriology, although holding great promise in some regards, deserves to be evaluated to see whether its claims about the Gospels can be verified and whether its soteriology is robust enough to encapsulate the theology of the Gospels, especially the various theological strands woven together in the Last Supper sayings.

The following chapter will set the stage for reading the Gospels by developing one of the theological strands that Girard avoids in his reading of the biblical canon: the Old Testament’s account of YHWH in covenant with Israel, Israel’s failure to keep the covenant’s stipulations, and the covenant’s dissolution. Though Israel is taken into exile as a result of the broken covenant, Israel’s hopes for restoration provide the bridge into the New Testament. While the following chapter advances a historical and theological background for understanding the covenant motif that appears in the Last Supper accounts, the chapter also argues that Girard’s hermeneutics of the Gospels has wrongfully elevated the importance of mythical texts to

---

346 Regarding the new grounds for victimization, one might be able to include here Vattimo’s contention that metaphysics is largely responsible for violence, which simply seems to turn metaphysics into another scapegoat. Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 113-21. Girard, however, does not see the end of metaphysics as the end of violence. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 254.
347 See also Finlan, *Problems with Atonement*, 93.
348 Kirwan, *Philosophy and Theology*, 72
establish the soteriological need that the Gospels address. To these essential matters, we now turn.
CHAPTER 3: JESUS AS SAVIOR IN WHICH STORY (PART 1)?—ISRAEL’S HOPES FOR RESTORATION

Every soteriology that heralds Jesus as the redeemer situates him within a larger tripartite narrative structure. Michael Root observed that every soteriology employs the same structural components: “Soteriology presumes two states of human existence, a state of deprivation (sin, corruption) and a state of release from that deprivation (salvation, liberation), and an event that produces a change from the first state to the second.”

Within distinctively Christian soteriologies, Jesus is the figure who precipitates the transition from the “state of deprivation” to the “state of release.”

349 See Michael Root, “The Narrative Structure of Soteriology,” Modern Theology 2, no. 2 (1986): 145. The one place where I disagree with Root is his assertion that atonement theories “are not theoretical” (Ibid., 155). He is followed here by others who conclude that narrative theology is somehow non-theoretical. See also Gijsbert van den Brink, “Narrative, Atonement, and the Christian Conception of the Good Life,” in Religion and the Good Life, ed. Marcel Sarot and Wessel Stoker (Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2004), 113-29, esp. 118-20. It seems to me that just because a narrative structure can be discerned at the core of all atonement theories, it does not follow that they are un-theoretical. For example, it is quite probable that atonement theories function like worldviews in that theoretical propositions and narratives are interchangeable. On the one hand, soteriologies—like worldviews—can be expressed in a set of coherent propositions (i.e. human sin creates a debt between humans and God or Jesus’ death deceives the devil). On the other hand, these same propositions can be transformed into a narrative that embeds them within a larger plot structure. The fact that the narrative of Christian soteriology has frequently undergone revision in order to support new propositions (For example, Anselm thought it unbecoming of God for him to have to make a deal with a devil and therefore excised the devil from his soteriological narrative) indicates that propositions drive narrative emendations as much as, if not more than, narratives determine theoretical implications. Regarding the interchangeability of narrative and proposition in worldviews, which function as an analogy for how one might see their interchangeability in soteriology, see James W. Sire, The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2009), 20-1. There is nothing inherently Christian in identifying this narrative structure in soteriology. Weinberger, for example, adopts Root’s structure to craft a Jewish soteriology. Theodore Weinberger, “Soteriology and the Promise of Narrative Theology,” Andover Newton Review 2, no. 1 (1991): 44-57. Goldberg also depicts a Jewish narrative soteriology, which he argues is different from the Christian version. See Michael Goldberg, “God, Action, and Narrative: Which Narrative? Which Action? Which God?” in Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 348-65.
Even though Christians have commonly agreed that Jesus Christ is the one who ushers in the “state of release,” there has been little agreement on what it means for Christ to accomplish salvation. To put it simply, there is agreement that Christ provides salvation, but no consensus on how he provides it. The many disagreements between various Christian soteriologies usually originate in the different ways the respective soteriologies frame the “state of deprivation” facing humanity. For example, according to Gregory of Nyssa, humans became the property of the devil through human sin and need to be ransomed from his control. Anselm thought it unconscionable that God would have to barter with the devil, and so he articulated a different “state of deprivation” that eliminated the devil from the scheme. Christian history is replete with other examples where different conceptions of humanity’s need for salvation alter the way in which Christ saves human beings. The point is that, however theologians construe the “state of deprivation,” it dictates what Jesus Christ must accomplish in his life, death, and resurrection in order to be the savior of humankind.

In order to articulate the human need or the “state of deprivation,” theologians have often drawn on various cultural or biblical resources. Anselm, for example, utilized the feudal structure of medieval Europe, which was readily available to him in the surrounding culture. For him, God resembled a divine feudal lord who needed to be honored at all times by his human subjects. When human sin besmirched this honor, they incurred a debt that they could never repay on their own. Only the incarnate God-man could perform a meritorious action that would restore the honor of the divine lord. In a similar manner, Christian theologians have drawn from a wealth of resources in order to explain why humans need liberation.

Girard’s soteriology is no different. The solution that his soteriology must provide originates in his mimetic theory. According to mimetic theory, when mimesis escalates into a
community-wide pogrom, it finds relief only when an innocent victim is murdered. As a result of the first murder, the scapegoat mechanism has imperceptibly tyrannized subsequent human culture, and the truth of human violence has been forever obfuscated through mythology, which condemns the victims and later apotheosizes them into gods. In Girard’s soteriology, this presupposed anthropology becomes the “state of deprivation” from which humans need emancipation. Only the Christ event can dismantle this sorry state of affairs when God undeniably reveals the inherent sinfulness of humanity. In the end, like a good many other thinkers, Girard has developed his notion of the human need for salvation before proceeding to Christ’s death and resurrection as the means of salvation.\textsuperscript{350} The only difference with Girard is the nature of the human need and his reliance upon modern ethnographic research to support it, which might be expected given his academic pedigree.

Without denying the ongoing need to make the Christ event understandable to modern Christians, are theologians at liberty to substitute different notions of the human problem as long as Christ still provides the solution?\textsuperscript{351} Can theologians utilize whatever cultural, philosophical, and theological resources lie at hand to articulate the human need for salvation? In a short but potent article on the atonement, Robert Jenson complains that Christian soteriology has often run amuck by ignoring the larger storyline in which the New Testament Gospels situate Jesus.\textsuperscript{352} All too often theologians remove Jesus from the historical and canonical storyline that the Gospels

\textsuperscript{350} Though individuals like James Alison might object to my way of framing Girard’s development of soteriology, I will simply point out that the progress of his research began with his mimetic theory before he ever ventured into the Gospels. His discovery of mimetic desire and its generation of violence among human beings was published in books like \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel} and \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, which antedate his engagement with the Gospels. The problem was theoretically in place before the solution was identified as Christ. See Alison, \textit{Being Wrong}, 3-11.

\textsuperscript{351} Root suggests that it is by writing, “Soteriology involves the recasting of the overall shape of the Christian story and of the internal patterns that both hold it together and form the matrix of its descriptions of particular events. This narrative redescription is not incidental to the task of soteriology, but constitutes the necessary means of achieving its goals” (Root, “Narrative Structure,” 155).

presuppose in order to put him into an interpretative schema of their choosing. To return again to Anselm, Jesus is situated in the larger construct of feudalism and is the one who satisfies the lord’s demands for honor. For Jenson, Anselm’s feudalistic soteriology is foreign to the Gospels. Abelard, in a contrasting yet all too similar move, “imagined a universal divine moral pedagogy aimed at educating moral creatures in virtue.”353 As a result, Christ’s death on the cross fosters love in human hearts, which enables them to fulfill the righteous demands of the law. While there are elements of both Anselm’s and Abelard’s soteriology present in the Gospels, several of the elements depart from the biblical storyline. Even though contemporary appropriation of Christ’s salvation is necessary for every generation, Jenson fears that theologians often haphazardly extract Jesus from his historical and theological context in the Gospels and place him into a foreign story. When this is done, the Christ event takes on new and sometimes contradictory meanings because Christ is made the panacea for problems and issues that were not in purview in the Gospels.354 Jenson would likely fault Girard for doing a similar thing in his soteriology.

In fact, one can argue that Girard’s hermeneutical approach to the Gospels is problematic in this regard for several reasons. First, Girard no longer seeks to understand the cross and resurrection from within the narrative of the Gospels themselves because the Gospels have been inserted into the storyline of Girard’s anthropology where Jesus subverts humanity’s penchant for scapegoats. In Hans Frei’s well-known book, The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative, he

353 Jenson, “Atonement,” 104.
354 George Lindbeck, “Scripture, Consensus, and Community,” in Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 88. Lindbeck warned about precisely this very thing. He wrote, “… the more a theology translates the scriptural message into an alien idiom (rather than vice versa) the more easily it can be construed as having captured the essence of the gospel, just as … Freud’s psychoanalytic interpretation is often treated by Freudians as having captured the essence of Oedipus Rex.” The result is that the new interpretation takes on a life of its own, supplanting the original event or text. This is potentially problematic in a theological setting that seeks to affirm the revelatory nature of the Christ event.
observed a marked shift in the interpretation of the biblical texts. In pre-modern biblical exegesis, the biblical narrative defined the lives of the interpreters because the pre-critical interpreters saw the biblical story running from creation to eternity as the story that governed their personal lives.\(^{355}\) Thus, the biblical story was the world they inhabited. However, with the rise of historical-critical exegesis, exegesis became governed by external corroboration. In sum, critical exegesis made the world outside of the text—the ability of archeology or other historical records to corroborate the biblical accounts—the controlling factor in determining the truth of the text. The irony that Frei constantly delights in noting is that both liberals and conservatives made the external world the determining factor of the biblical story. In an effort to substantiate their respective views of the Bible, both succeeded in forsaking the meaning located in the biblical narrative.\(^{356}\) According to Frei, the meaning of a text can only be located in the narrative it contains.\(^{357}\) In *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, Frei identifies how interpreters abandon the New Testament narratives in order to define Jesus. One way is “by adding a kind of depth dimension to the story’s surface, which is actually a speculative inference from what is given in the story, rather than a part of it. This procedure enables us to write something like the story behind the story….”\(^{358}\) Unfortunately, the “story behind the story” most often governs what the narratives about Jesus mean, distorting them to fit external needs or desires.\(^{359}\) For Frei, this is a faulty way of proceeding, even if it delivers attractive results. Rather, if we are going to understand Jesus and his mission, Frei asserts that Jesus’ “identity is grasped only by means of the story told about

---

\(^{355}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{357}\) Frei, *Eclipse*, 270.
\(^{359}\) Ibid. He explains the deleterious effects the foreign narrative has thusly, “… an independently derived notion of Jesus’ identity really shapes the story to conform to that notion.”
Thus, the Gospels and the narratives they tell provide the key to understanding Jesus and what he accomplished. Girard’s presupposition of the scapegoat mechanism’s control over human culture constitutes another example of what Frei terms “the story behind the story.” Though Girard offers an attractive exposition of human culture, his version of the “state of deprivation” precedes his engagement with the biblical text and ultimately determines the nature of salvation that Christ provides.

Second, Girard’s hermeneutics places the entire collection of biblical texts in counterpoint to a foreign body of literature. Instead of inferring the meaning of the biblical texts by allowing the texts to speak on their own, Girard proceeds by a direct contrast between the biblical texts and mythology in order to discern the inherent meaning and purpose of the biblical texts. For example, Girard contrasts the story of Joseph’s unjust treatment with the myth of Oedipus, who is deemed worthy of the charges of incest and parricide. Likewise, the dialogues of Job are also set in contrast to the Oedipus account. For Girard, the calumny of Job’s friends against him indicates he is another innocent victim of the scapegoat mechanism. Even

---

360 Ibid., 87.
361 A glance at the subdivisions of the book where Girard first identified Jesus as the Savior, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, reveals the role that his mimetic theory plays in describing how Jesus saves human beings. The first part of the book is entitled “Fundamental Anthropology,” which entails his notion of human origins and the foundational murder. The second part is the “Judaeo-Christian Scriptures” which then turns to the biblical texts, identifying Jesus as the one who successfully unveils the scapegoat mechanism for all to see. This second part cannot stand on its own, for his articulation of how Jesus provides liberation can only make sense when written after the first part, which describes the origins of the scapegoat mechanism.

362 While Girard says this is not the case with all biblical stories, it certainly is indicative of the way he exeges the story of Joseph. See Girad, *Evolution and Conversion*, 201. Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 141-79. See also Fleming, *René Girard*, 116-8. The one criticism I have of Fleming is that he states Girard believes a proper understanding of the Bible can only emerge from a realization of the similarities between the Bible and mythology. Here, Fleming does not go far enough, for Girard identifies the similitude between the Bible and myth with the ultimate goal of identifying their differences. Identifying similarities is thus a means to the end of identifying the unique contributions of the Bible.

364 Girard, *Job*, 33-40. While it is not clear that Job’s precipitous rise and fall is as drastic as Girard maintains—for instance, there is no mob calling for Job’s elimination, just a few friends suggesting that he has wronged God in some way—Girard holds that Job is experiencing the rise and fall typical of the scapegoat mechanism where a person turns from being the ideal model of all to being the scapegoat who bears the vitriol of the
the climactic point of God’s revelation, the Christ event, is set in contrast with Apollonius of Tyana. By contrasting the biblical stories with myths, Girard concludes that the Bible exclusively defends the innocence of the victims while the myths justify their executions. Comparing and contrasting the biblical texts with mythology does constitute a worthwhile apologetic endeavor, and Girard has done excellent work in defense of the biblical texts in this regard. Nevertheless, Girard overextends the implications of this comparison between the Bible and mythology. Though it is fully legitimate to identify the chief differences between mythology and the biblical texts, it is quite another to insist that these differences constitute the quintessential point of the biblical storyline. Thus, it is highly questionable whether this contrast should be allowed to determine the sole meaning and import of the biblical stories themselves, including the Gospels, as Girard has done. The upshot of Girard’s hermeneutic is that an external reference point, i.e. mythology, becomes the prism for identifying the salvific content revealed in the Bible and reduces the biblical storyline to the univocal agenda of deconstructing mythology. This is certainly a step away from Frei’s approach of discovering Jesus’ identity in the narratives told about him.

Girard’s defense of the Bible’s uniqueness, though, comes at a price, for he can only rescue them by suppressing and ignoring many of the explicitly developed themes in the biblical texts. For Girard, the biblical narratives are telling one story, namely, the story of how God has been at work in revealing humanity’s violence. In order to amass evidence of the Bible’s

crowd. The text of Job alone would not necessarily result in such an exegetical conclusion and only the comparison with Oedipus makes it possible.


unique defense of the victims, Girard must suppress and even ignore important theological emphases that span the biblical canon. One finds little to no development, for instance, of Israel’s complicated experience of being in a covenant relationship with YHWH, which consistently emerges in both Old and New Testaments. Instead, according to Girard, the ultimate story in the Bible is not one of God’s workings with the nation of Israel, but rather, the slow dismemberment of mythological thought. This is not to deny that portions of the Bible situate themselves over against the mythological views of the world of their time. In fact, if anything, one can argue that Girard’s understanding of the Bible’s subversion of mythology is not nearly as far-reaching as it should be.\(^{367}\) However, in making mythology the lens for identifying what is unique in the Bible, Girard limits himself to a very selective portion of the Bible, which distorts several of his interpretations. In the attempt to remove the biblical texts from criticism, Girard ends up reading the Bible in light of mythological texts, which remain largely at the periphery of biblical thought.\(^{368}\) As a result, the story that the biblical texts tell is often ignored in an effort to substantiate the purportedly unique biblical defense of the victims.


\(^{368}\) One can also observe Girard’s frequent choice of Greek mythology over Ancient Near Eastern mythology. The former might be the polemical target of the New Testament texts, but it is highly questionable whether these would be in view for the Old Testament texts. Girard’s argument could be better supported if he did more comparisons with the Ancient Near Eastern mythology from the regions surrounding ancient Israel.
To borrow the term, this constitutes “hermeneutical violence” because Girard’s hermeneutics can only survive at the expense of other themes and theological insights in the biblical texts.  

Third, Girard’s biblical hermeneutics, which contrasts the biblical texts with mythological ones, potentially jeopardizes the coherence of his view of God. Girard assiduously affirms that God does not participate in the rivalry endemic to human culture because he does not condescend to retaliate with more evil. According to him, the age-old human problem begins with the plague of warring doubles, where two individuals are locked into a duel over a particular object with both claiming legitimacy. God, according to Girard, does not stoop to play such games. However, the only means by which Girard can establish the uniqueness of the biblical texts is to identify the differences that exist between the Bible and mythology. This reconstructs a rivalry between the Bible and myth with both sides claiming truth, and such rivalry is the initial stage of the mimetic conflict. Of course, Girard is able to support his claim for the truth of the Bible by deconstructing the validity of mythological texts. However, the point can only be made on the pain of contradiction. God can only reveal the truth of humankind by opposing the lies in the world, which establishes difference and some kind of rivalry between competing points of view. In the end, the truth of the Bible can only emerge by demarcating differences, which instigates rivalry and potentially the mimetic cycle.

---

370 Girard, Job, 146-7. In the temptations, Jesus refuses to enter into the mimetic process by rejecting Satan’s offer for control of the world. The essence of the temptation seeks to supplant God and enthrone Satan as the object of one’s worship. See Girard, Scapegoat, 196-7.
371 Girard is aware of this dilemma or so it seems. When asked about whether one can find in the Bible a “moment in which revelation and monotheism are opposed to scapegoating and polytheism,” he seems to evade the issue by using different terminology: “Any form of opposition would be mimetic, so I would rather not see any radical break” (Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 204). On the following page, Girard affirms that within the biblical canon, there is no “radical reinterpretation” but only “revelation” (Ibid., 205). Girard seems to equivocate on his choice of terminology. If the same phenomena were visible in myths, Girard would likely label it as a form of mimetic rivalry. However, since the biblical texts exhibit the truth, he categorizes it as “revelation.” This appears to be verbal legerdemain. To put it simply, in comparing biblical texts to myths, Girard credits one with revealing truth and the other with obfuscating it. This claims one group of texts is superior to another group of texts, which rehabilitates a form of rivalry that Girard wishes to undo altogether. Even though he desires to dismiss

In light of the hermeneutical issues that confront Girard’s thought, a different approach to reading the Gospels and the Bible seems warranted. This chapter and the following will proceed more inductively and attempt to listen to the Gospels on their own terms, seeing how they establish Jesus as a saving figure. As we have seen thus far, every soteriology requires a “state of deprivation.” However, is this something that interpreters must bring to the Gospels or is it one that the Gospels supply? As Michael Root has rightly argued, the Gospels are not “uninterpreted data” but texts which possess “at least the seeds of interpretations in [their] descriptions of events and the patterns that organize those events into a narrative.”

Unfortunately, Root never identifies what these “seeds of interpretations” are or what parameters the biblical narratives establish for soteriology. In order to fill in this lacuna, this chapter and its sequel will identify “the seeds of interpretations” latent in the Gospels, which should inform current soteriological reflection. In fact, I contend that the Gospels provide us with a good deal more than simply “the seeds of interpretations.” The thesis of these next two chapters is that the Gospels, when read in light of the biblical canon, presuppose a particular “state of deprivation” instead of giving us a solution in search of a human problem. To put it another way, the Gospels come preloaded with a particular articulation of the human need for salvation that determines the manner in which Jesus functions as a saving figure.

In what follows, I argue that the Gospels, despite being narratives in their own right, situate Jesus within a larger narrative that contains its own particular “state of deprivation.” This is not the story of humanity bound in mythological lies or in debt to a feudal lord, but rather the

differentiation here, he is at least forced to admit its presence in some form later in the book where he says there is a “structural difference between archaic religion and Christianity” (Ibid., 218). Girard also seems to claim objectivity for the victim’s account against the victimizer’s account. See Girard, Job, 107. While the victim’s account might provide more correspondence with the truth, one also cannot rule out the fact that the victim might try to use the story in order to victimize the persecutors in return.

story of Israel awaiting her restoration at the hand of YHWH. This is the story that informs the Synoptic understanding of Jesus, which is revealed by the role that the Old Testament plays in identifying the importance of Jesus, explicating his proclamation of God’s kingdom, and explaining the meaning of the symbolic actions he undertakes during his ministry. It is my contention that the Gospels already presuppose a certain “state of deprivation” that was elucidated in Israel’s story in the biblical texts, namely her experience of exile and punishment for breaking the covenant. For the Gospel writers, Jesus is first and foremost the savior in this larger narrative, for it is in this more encompassing story that they situate their own individual narratives about Jesus.

In order to demonstrate that the Gospels presuppose the particular back story of Israel as definitive of the “state of deprivation,” I will begin by identifying the key elements of Israel’s own story, especially her experience of exile at the hands of foreign powers. Despite suffering defeat and exile, Israel retained hope that God would restore her fortunes. These expectations and hopes, which reverberated throughout Jewish culture during the Second Temple period in variegated forms, provided the intellectual resources necessary to identify Jesus as a saving figure. These will be articulated in the remainder of this chapter.

The most likely explanation as to why the Gospels situate Jesus in the larger story of Israel is because this is how he understood himself. See E. P. Sanders, “Jesus and the Kingdom: The Restoration of Israel and the New People of God,” in Jesus, the Gospels, and the Church: Essays in Honor of William R. Farmer, ed. E. P. Sanders (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), 225-39.

Citing these other texts, especially the intertestamental literature, might receive a curious glance from some as if it were once again using external material to construct the “story behind the story.” The intention behind using the intertestamental literature is twofold. On the one hand, it informs our understanding of how terms like “kingdom of God” were used in the first century. It is thus a way of enhancing our understanding and demonstrating whether particular interpretations and expectations were probable within the first century. After all, many interpretations are possible, but the real question is whether a particular interpretation was probably the case. The Jewish intertestamental literature helps us determine probability. On the other hand, it also demonstrates continuity. When one can find Old Testament expectations that carry through the intertestamental literature into the New Testament with little variation, it becomes much easier to identify likely connections between the Gospels and the Old Testament. Such instances solidify the conviction that the New Testament Gospels see their narratives about Jesus extending from the story of Israel contained in the Old Testament. As a result, incorporating the Jewish texts
3.A. Israel’s Theological Interpretation of Her History—an Abridged Version

3.A.1. Israel—YHWH’s Covenant Partner

Israel’s canonical history begins in Genesis with a brief overview of the primordial past. God the Creator had infused the world with goodness and blessing. However, the harmony and goodness of the created order was disrupted by human sin and disobedience, resulting in the curse and exile from the sacred presence of Eden (Gen. 3:14-22). In Genesis 3-11, it seems as if sin and evil have gained the upper hand. Creation itself unravels as death becomes the final experience of every human being. In response to this state of affairs, God does not remain idle but chooses Abraham and his family as the vehicles through which God would return his creational blessing to the world. The language of blessing in God’s promise to Abraham should not be overlooked, for God promises Abraham, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3). God’s election of Abraham and his family, the Israelites, was ultimately for the purpose of blessing “all the families of the earth.” From the viewpoint of Genesis, Israel was to be God’s means of restoring creation to its original goodness and undoing the curse of sin and evil.375

A couple hundred years passed, and Abraham’s family grew. However, instead of being free people in their own land, Abraham’s descendants were subjugated to slavery by the Egyptians. YHWH, however, heard the plight of his people and came to their rescue. In the Exodus, God delivered his people from Pharaoh’s tyrannous grip through a series of miraculous

---

interventions. En route to the land God had promised the patriarchs, Israel entered into a formalized covenant relationship with God at Mt. Sinai. By entering into the covenant at Sinai, Israel became YHWH’s “treasured possession” and “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5-6).\textsuperscript{376} The covenant designated Israel as God’s peculiar people among the nations and his means of bringing blessing to the world.

There are few theological concepts that have shaped Old Testament theology more than the notion of God being in a covenant with Israel.\textsuperscript{377} The covenant established the boundaries and the expectations for the relationship between YHWH and his people. First of all, the covenant with YHWH, as any other covenant in the Ancient Near East, required loyalty and exclusivity. Jon Levenson believes that the emergence of monotheism in the Old Testament can be traced to the notion of a covenant between YHWH and Israel.\textsuperscript{378} As Levenson observes, covenantal arrangements were exclusory by nature and mandated loyalty, as does a monotheistic worldview. That the covenant with YHWH expected no less from its constituents can be seen in the very first stipulation, the first of the Ten Commandments: “you shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). By contrast, other Ancient Near Eastern religions were much more inclusive and adopted other deities more readily. This noticeable difference suggests that the monotheism of ancient Israel derives from the understanding that she existed in a relationship with YHWH that excluded her from entertaining other partners (i.e. gods).

\textsuperscript{376} The implication of being a “priestly kingdom” is that all Israelites bore the function of a priest in relationship to God, which was part of their calling to be a blessing to the world. William H. Propp, \textit{Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary} (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 157-60.


\textsuperscript{378} Levenson, \textit{Sinai and Zion}, 56-70.
Not only did the covenant desire loyalty from YHWH’s covenant partner, but it also included ethical norms for how to relate to one’s neighbor. Since the covenant established a relationship between YHWH and the covenant partners, it also created solidarity with other participants in the covenant. Because the individual participates in the covenantal relationship with other individuals, YHWH’s ethical norms mediated one’s relationships with fellow human beings. Thus, being in relationship with YHWH mandated a particular kind of treatment of one’s neighbor, and one could not live in a particular religious relationship that was not also ethically apparent in the treatment of one’s neighbor. These stipulations are summarized in the latter portion of the Ten Commandments with prohibitions against murder, theft, slander, and envy (Exod. 20:13-17).

As with any relationship, though, there are consequences if the expectations are not fulfilled. The stipulations of the Sinai covenant are repeated in Deuteronomy, an updated form of the covenant. There Moses, speaking on behalf of God, informs his audience of the potential results of being in covenant:

See I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess (Deut 30:16-18).

---

379 As Boda notes, “… laws of this sort are placed within the broader covenantal context that identifies law as response to the gracious initiative (the exodus) of the lawgiver and establishes accountability between the covenant partners.” Mark J. Boda, A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament, Siphrut 1 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 120; cf. 185, 517.

380 Levenson, Sinai and Zion, 53. Levenson writes, “The covenantal relationship, then, is not polar but triangular. At the top stands God, and at each of the two angles of the base stand Israelites. Each of them relates to his neighbor through norms decreed by God. Or, to put it differently, individual Israelites relate to each other as vassals of the same suzerain.”
In sum, Israel’s continued residency in the promised land was contingent upon her faithfulness to the covenantal relationship. Obedience would result in blessing and flourishing, while disobedience would bring exile and defeat at the hand of foreign powers.

3.A.2. The Monarchy and its Demise

After the Exodus, the Israelites settle in the promised land of Canaan. Eventually the tribal federation of the Exodus is consolidated into a single kingdom under King Saul. Saul, despite his great potential, disobeys God on several occasions and eventually dies at the hands of foreign enemies. His successor, David, is regarded as a man after God’s heart (1 Sam. 13:14) and becomes the model for the ideal king. As a result, God establishes another covenant specifically with David and his family. In it, he promises that David’s dynasty would continue to rule over God’s people (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Moreover, God would regard David’s descendants as his own sons, punishing them when they disobey, but never removing his line from the throne.

David’s son Solomon succeeds him and augments the kingdom to its largest size. In addition, Solomon also builds the first Jerusalem temple, which becomes a central symbol in the life of ancient Israel. Solomon, though, is the last ruler over the united kingdom. Under his son’s reign, the kingdom divides into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and Southern Kingdom (Judah) around 922 BCE.

The story of the Northern Kingdom, as recounted in the biblical texts, is one of apostasy and idolatry. The first king of the Northern Kingdom, Jereboam, erects two altars to golden calves in order to preclude his people from going to Jerusalem to worship. This move cemented his political power since his people would be less likely to desert to the Southern Kingdom.

---

381 Although some might read the stipulations of the covenant as God imposing his will upon Israel, there are many places where God is persuading, not coercing them to enter into the covenant. See McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, 55; Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 417.
because they would have no need to travel there to worship. While the worship at the altar to the golden calves likely continues YHWH worship, it does so by departing from the prohibitions against making images of YHWH. As one might expect, the biblical texts view Jereboam’s golden calves as disobeying the covenantal expectations (1 Kings 13:1-4, 33-34). Eventually, the succeeding kings openly defect from YHWH worship altogether. The religious life of the Northern Kingdom reaches its nadir when King Ahab erects a temple to Baal, a Canaanite god, in the center of the capital (1 Kings 16:32). The legacy of the Northern Kingdom, from the view of the biblical writers, is certainly not a positive one. None of the kings are described as “good kings” because they fail to initiate moral and religious reform. Instead, they follow in the “sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat.” Thus, the fidelity expected in the covenant with YHWH had been repeatedly shattered with little intention of restoring it by any of the kings of the Northern Kingdom.

In 722 BCE, a mere two centuries after the Northern Kingdom’s genesis, the Assyrian empire vanquishes it and takes its inhabitants into exile. The theological reasons behind this unfortunate state of affairs are articulated quite plainly in 1 Kings:

This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They had worshiped other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced…. They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their ancestors, and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false; they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do as they did (2 Kings 17:7-8,15).

To put it simply, the Northern Kingdom suffers exile because they failed to observe the covenant faithfully. In defecting from YHWH and worshipping other gods, they had violated the

---

382 1 Kings 16:26, 31; 2 Kings 10:29; 13:2, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28.
expectations set forth in the covenant. As a result, they were on the receiving end of the covenant curses, which were death and exile from the land.

The Southern Kingdom’s history plays out a bit differently, though it shares a similar fate. In contrast to the Northern Kingdom that had no “good kings,” the Southern Kingdom had intermittent “good kings” who led the country in religious reform, even though they too had their share of bad kings. In fact, the Southern Kingdom narrowly escaped the onslaught of the Assyrian superpower because it had King Hezekiah at its helm who had introduced religious reforms that promoted YHWH worship (1 Kings 18:1-19:37; Isaiah 36-39). However, after Hezekiah, there were several series of evil kings who despised the covenant and promoted wanton idolatry. The situation became irreparable, and, like the Northern Kingdom, the Southern Kingdom also suffered punishment for departing from the covenant. Through a series of invasions and deportations, which finally leveled Jerusalem in 586 BCE, the neo-Babylonian empire laid waste the Southern Kingdom and its temple. Again, the theological rationale for this political experience connects the Babylonian invasion with the sins of their bad kings. When the biblical record explains why this occurs, it says:

Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, for all that he had committed, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord was not willing to pardon (2 Kings 24:3-4; cf. 2 Chron. 36:5-16).

Thus, although the covenant with YHWH held out the potential for blessing and life, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms reap the opposite, cursing and death, because they forsook the covenant.\footnote{The experience of exile, which was connected to Israel’s inability to follow the covenant stipulations, becomes the essential part of Israel’s story that the early Christians take up. In Michael Goldberg’s differentiation between Jewish and Christian stories, he portrays the Jewish story as one in which God and humans are “co-partners in salvation” (Goldberg, “God, Action, and Narrative,” 363). According to him, the God of Jewish history would never unilaterally act to save humankind because he had not done so in the Sinai covenant. If God were to assume
3.B. Hopes for Restoration

With the Northern Kingdom’s defeat and exile at the hand of the Assyrians and the Southern Kingdom’s defeat by the Babylonians, the promised threats of the covenant had been enacted. While one might expect that this would sound the death knell for the Israelites and their religion, the experience of exile actually produces the opposite. Within the shadow of foreign empires, the Israelites flourish. This was in large part due to the fact that, though they had experienced desolation at the hands of their conquerors, they anticipated a future wherein God would restore their fortunes.

Hopes for a restored Israel were not hard to find. The very prophets who had heralded the coming desolation of Israel and Judah had also prophesied that Israel’s covenant God would not let her languish in exile forever. Consequently, the prophetic oracles fostered hopes for a restored Israel, which pervades many of the extant Jewish writings dating from the post-exilic times and into the Christian era.

In what follows, I summarize several of the specific hopes for restoration after the exile. It reveals that, for Israel, her story was not simply locked away in the canonized past. Rather, it was a story in which the script was still being written, and the divine author had already hinted at what was about to transpire. While the Jewish people looked to the past and identified ways in which God had worked in her history, they also looked to the future, anticipating a forthcoming

---

384 For an appropriation of exilic theology and its ability to flourish with the loss of the land and temple in order to nourish modern Christian thought on its own loss of power, see the provocative study: Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

work of her covenant redeemer. Though the following material might seem like a detour, this material is essential, for it is the story of Israel’s experience of exile and anticipated return that the Gospel stories presuppose when they tell the story of Jesus.\(^{386}\)

3.B.1. *New Exodus*

The first of these hopes is the hope for a “new exodus.” During the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions, portions of the Jewish population were removed from the land of promise. Like the original Exodus where the Jews had been enslaved to a foreign power, the Assyrians and Babylonians had removed some of the Israelites from their homeland to serve foreign empires. The hope for a new exodus was that God would repeat what he had done in the first exodus where he had intervened and rescued Israel from an oppressive regime, bringing her to the land of promise. Using the first exodus as a type for what God was going to do on behalf of his exiled people, the prophets announced a message of hope and liberation: Israel would return from exile in a new exodus. This time, however, the people would come from Mesopotamia instead of Egypt.

Jeremiah, for example, ministering during the Babylonian invasions, utters the following oracle:

> Therefore, days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, “As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,” but “as the Lord lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of the all the lands where he had driven them.” Then they shall live in their own land (Jer. 23:7-8).

Here the expected future act of bringing the covenant people back from exile is set in relief against the former exodus from Egypt. When God acted to bring them back from exile, it would

\(^{386}\) E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 118. “What we know with almost complete assurance—on the basis of facts—is that *Jesus is to be positively connected with the hope for Jewish restoration*” (emphasis is his).
be worthy of comparison with the original exodus, even superseding it in their communal consciousness.

With a similar expectation, Ezekiel prophesies the future re-gathering of Israel, “Therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel” (Ezek. 11:17). In another passage, he utters a similar oracle: “I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered…” (Ezek. 20:34a). Similar refrains and expectations occur throughout the book of Ezekiel, revealing that the exile would end with a re-gathering of Israel to her homeland.387

Second Isaiah possesses a dense cluster of passages, which likewise anticipate a new exodus.388 The opening verses of Second Isaiah contain the famous lines: “A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain” (Isa 40:3-4). The leveling of the mountains is later identified as the making of a road, which will allow the exiles to return: “And I will turn all my mountains into a road, and my highways shall be raised up” (Isa. 49:11). Though the language here speaks of geological renovation, the imagery symbolizes God’s creative work in returning the exiles to the land.389

---

387 See also Ezek. 28:25; 34:11-13; 36:24, 28; 39:26-8.
The post-exilic Jewish literature frequently reiterates these same hopes and expectations that have their foundation in the prophetic texts above. The following are texts that demonstrate the hope for a new exodus continued well into the intertestamental era. Some of these depict a future event while others are prayers to God, which reveal that, from the vantage point of the author, the new exodus still lies in the future. For example, the author of Baruch writes, “Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you…” (Baruch 5:5-6b). In this same vein, Sirach also possesses a similar expectation despite its sapiential and non-apocalyptic character: “Gather all the tribes of Jacob, and give them their inheritance, as at the beginning” (Sirach 36:13-6). 2 Maccabees likewise suggests that an imminent gathering was about to take place through the voice of one its protagonists: “We have hope in God that he will soon have mercy on us and will gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place…” (2 Macc. 2:18b). Finally, the Psalms of Solomon also expect a future return of the people: “Stand on a high place, Jerusalem, and look at your children, from the east and the west assembled together by the Lord. From the north they come in the joy of their God; from far distant islands God has assembled them” (Pss. Sol. 11:2-3).
The above texts demonstrate that one of the pervasive hopes for restoration expected God to reassemble the twelve tribes that had been scattered during the exile. God, who had rescued Israel from Egypt’s domination in the past, would emancipate the exiles and bring them back to dwell in their own land. Moreover, this hope for restoration appears in a wide array of literature, ranging from the wisdom literature like Sirach to the narratives of 2 Maccabees and the more apocalyptic Psalms of Solomon. This was not just an expectation of certain apocalyptic authors, but a hope that many shared. For them, at some point in the future, the exile would be reversed and God would bring Zion’s children streaming back to her.

3.B.2. New Covenant

From the view of the biblical writers, Israel’s experience of exile was inherently intertwined with the covenant. Her infidelity to the covenant had warranted the exile in the first place. Only because Israel had transgressed the stipulations of the covenant, had YHWH dissolved the relationship by enacting the curses of the covenant. It would therefore follow that if YHWH were to bring his people back from exile, he would enter again into a covenant relationship with them. In other words, the ruptured covenantal relationship would need to be resumed if Israel were to be reconstituted, and this is precisely what one finds in the prophetic texts of the Old Testament.

393 There is some question regarding the authenticity of Sirach 36. Even if the text is a later interpolation, it simply means that the hopes for a new exodus were not original to this sapiential text. Nevertheless, even if it is a later interpolation, it still would provide another piece of evidence that Jewish authors during this time anticipated the reconstitution of Israel. For dating the work and its composite sections, see M. Gilbert, “Wisdom Literature,” in Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus, ed. Michael E. Stone (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 298-99.

394 It is essential to understand the Deuteronomic viewpoint that the exile resulted from Israel’s failure to keep the covenant. Schwager, who follows Girard quite closely, is able to talk about Jesus regathering Israel, but he lacks the theological presupposition that Israel’s sin was a reason for the exile, which allows him to discredit any notion of God actually punishing sin. See Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 111-3.
The well-known text from Jeremiah most explicitly displays the hope for a new covenantal arrangement between YHWH and his people. As a result, it is worth quoting in toto.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-4).

To begin, the promise of a new covenant expects the reconstitution of the covenantal relationship between YHWH and his people.\(^{395}\) In the new covenant, he “will be their God” and Israel would be his “people,” which is the covenantal formula that appears throughout Scripture.\(^{396}\) At the same time, there is a disjunction that separates this covenant with the previous one ratified at Sinai. In the new covenant, God assumes a more active role in crafting the obedient covenant partner he desires so that they would obey his law.\(^{397}\) Writing this law upon their hearts provided a more durable substance for the covenant than the former tablets of stone that Moses had broken on the mountain.\(^{398}\) Nor could it be misplaced or lost like the book of the law found under Josiah’s reign (2 Kings 22:8). Nevertheless, it was the same law, which reveals that there is continuity between the old and new covenants.\(^{399}\) The divine expectations for the covenant

---

\(^{395}\) The promise of the new covenant presages the restoration of the people of Israel as a whole since the covenant is made with both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.


\(^{397}\) The anticipated work of God seems consonant with Ezekiel’s depiction of God’s restoration of his people where a more active role on God’s part is also expected. Patrick D. Miller, *The Book of Jeremiah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections in The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 6:812.


partner had not changed. Instead, the change was to be found in the covenant partner’s new ability to fulfill the covenant. Finally, YHWH promises to forgive their sins. This promise of forgiveness should be viewed in light of the belief that the exile was a direct punishment for sin. When God forgave Israel, her punishment for sin—the exile—would end. Consequently, the forgiveness of sin would signal the end of Israel’s exile. Elsewhere, Jeremiah refers to this covenant as an “everlasting covenant” (Jer. 50:5). The added quality of permanence relies, on the one hand, with God’s established commitment to Israel in spite of her moral and relational failings. On the other hand, Israel is expected to be a different kind of covenant partner that will no longer forsake her passionate lover.  

Similarly, Ezekiel expects that the ruptured covenant will be renewed by one that surpasses the first covenant:

Yes, thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath, breaking the covenant; yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of my covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you and you shall know that I am the Lord, in order that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord God (Ezek. 16:59-63).

Again, we see the coalescence of several themes that were present in Jeremiah. The re-establishment of the covenant correlates with the forgiveness of Israel. The sin that had ruptured the relationship would be absolved, and God himself would be the one who atoned for their sin.  

Moreover, there is an enduring permanence in the new covenant since it will be an

---

400 Jeremiah 32:40, “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me.”

401 Donald E. Gowan, Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death and Resurrection of Israel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 136. Gowan notes that here we see a unique progression. Rather than granting forgiveness after Israel realizes its sin, it seems Israel can only really realize her sin after being offered atonement and forgiveness first: “That is, only when one is offered and can accept forgiveness is it possible to see one’s life without apology and to take full responsibility for what one has done.” As noted by others, the shame of
“everlasting covenant” as God’s covenants with Noah, the patriarchs, and David had been (Ezek. 16:60; 37:26). Like Jeremiah, the only reason the covenant could be expected to last forever lies in the new heart and the new spirit that God would impart, which will be developed more in the following hope for restoration. Riddled throughout Ezekiel are expectations that God will ratify the covenant with Israel once again. Sometimes he calls it the “covenant of peace” (Ezek. 34:25; 37:26), which captures the return of creational blessing to the world, the original intent of the covenant with Abraham. At other points, he speaks of bringing Israel into “the bond of the covenant” (Ezek. 20:37). Together, these texts indicate that, though Israel had broken the covenant and was currently suffering her just deserts in exile, things would not always lie in a state of disrepair. When God acted on Israel’s behalf, he would reinstate the covenantal relationship with his people.

In a similar vein, several Isaianic texts affirm the enduring nature of God’s renewed covenant with Israel: “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you” (Isa. 54:10). In this passage, the covenantal relationship mirrors the giving of marital vows. YHWH’s “steadfast love” ensures that the covenant with his people will never come to an end. Other passages affirm the permanence of the covenant by indicating that, though God will still give Israel justice and allow her to be punished, afterward the exilic experience would remain. What is given here is not cheap grace that ignores the past infractions, but mercy that accepts the feeble covenant partner and expects a change in behavior. See also Walther Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Klaus Baltzer, and Leonard Jay Greenspoon, trans. Ronald E. Clements (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 353.

For other uses of “everlasting covenant,” in the Bible see Gen. 9:16; 17:7, 13, 19; 2 Sam. 23:5; 1 Chron. 16:17; and Ps. 105:10.

William H. Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19 (Waco: Word, 1986), 251. The fact that these hopes for restoration presuppose one another indicates that these hopes would be fulfilled in conjunction with each other.

It is possible, as some suggest, that this “covenant of peace” is meant to mirror God’s covenant with Noah after the flood. If so, then the author sees the inauguration of this covenant as the commencement of a new age. See Baltzer, Deutero-Isaiah, 446-7.
he will establish “an everlasting covenant with them” (Isa. 61:8; cf. 55:3). Although passages in Isaiah simply corroborate dimensions of the new covenant hopes that were identified in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, there are some sections that add to the developing picture. For example, YHWH’s servant becomes a “covenant to the people” (Isa. 42:6; 49:8), which quite possibly alludes to an extension of God’s covenant to those beyond Israel’s borders since the “people” are likely Gentiles.405 If so, the covenant is not exclusively directed at Israel but returns benefits to those normally deemed outside of the covenant community. Moreover, whereas Moses was the mediator of the covenant at Sinai, here YHWH’s servant actually becomes the covenant. Though the phrasing is odd, it suggests the servant “is the concrete means by which God’s relationship with Israel is embodied and manifested.”406 In other words, the servant would inaugurate the covenantal relationship anew.

The major prophets of the biblical canon all attest, in various ways, to the expected hope that Israel’s restoration would include the resumption of the covenantal relationship. Only this time, the covenant would be an eternal one. Exactly how widespread the hope for a new covenant was in the intertestamental era is difficult to ascertain. Certainly, it is not as well attested as many of the other hopes for restoration, which has led some people to suggest that covenantal theology was not as thoroughgoing as one might expect.407 Still, the hope for a new covenant emerges in several prominent Second Temple Jewish texts, which demonstrates the hope still retained its force for at least some of the Jews during this time. For example, in the

406 Seitz, Isaiah, 430.
407 Lester L. Grabbe, “Did all Jews Think Alike? ‘Covenant’ in Philo and Josephus in the Context of Second Temple Judaic Religion,” in The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Jacqueline C.R. de Roo (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 264. While I appreciate the author’s caution here, it is not apparent that the silence of many of the ancient Jewish authors regarding Israel as God’s covenant people insinuates they lacked such a self-understanding.
book of *Jubilees*, Abraham’s blessing to Jacob, collocates the hope for Israel’s renewal of the covenant and the forgiveness of her sins:

> May he cleanse you from all sin and defilement, so that he might forgive all your transgressions, and your erring through ignorance…. And may he renew his covenant with you, so that you might be a people for him, belonging to his inheritance forever. And he will be God for you and for your seed in truth and righteousness throughout all the days of the earth (*Jubilees* 22:14-5; cf. 22:30; OTP 2:98).

The pattern of covenant renewal has become the paradigm for Israel’s historicized relationship with her covenant-keeping God. Another important text, Baruch 2:35, sounds much like the prophetic literature with its promise of an eternal covenant: “I will make an everlasting covenant with them to be their God and they shall be my people; and I will never again remove my people Israel from the land that I have given them.”

The repeated theme of return and covenant occur together, indicating that the new exodus and reconstitution of Israel coincide with the institution of the “everlasting covenant.”

No other group of texts during the Second Temple period references the covenant as frequently as the Qumran scrolls. This is due to the fact that the Qumran community understood themselves as having entered into a covenantal pact. Everyone who entered into their community and submitted to the injunctions of *The Community Rule* had entered into “the Covenant before God.” Thus, they viewed their community’s rules as an outright covenant with God. Moreover, in multiple instances, the Damascus Document refers to a time in the community’s past when they had established a “New Covenant” in Damascus. It is safe to

---

408 Dating the book of Baruch is particularly difficult. Portions of the book (Baruch 1:1-3:8) were translated along with the rest of Jeremiah in 116 BCE, which suggests part of the book was written prior to this time. As a result, some time in the second century BCE is probably well founded. See George W. E. Nickelsburg, “The Bible Rewritten and Expanded,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, 140-6.

409 1QS 1.16-26 (trans. Vermes). See also CD 2.2.

410 CD 8.20-1; 6.19; 19.33; and 20.10b-12; cf. 1QpHab2.3-6.
say, the Qumran community understood themselves as a covenant community focused on being faithful to God.

In appropriating language of the new covenant to define themselves, the question arises whether the Qumran community saw themselves as heir to Jeremiah’s new covenant or whether they understood their covenant differently. Unfortunately, the word “new” (חדש) is ambiguous in this application because it can mean “new” as in brand new, or it can mean something like “renew.” In what sense did the Qumran community believe their community had entered a “new” covenant? Most scholars have concluded that the Qumran community understood their covenant as a renewed covenant rather than Jeremiah’s new covenant for several reasons.  

First, the covenant being renewed is the Sinai covenant. When a person joined the community, he undertook “a binding oath to return with all his heart and soul to every commandment of the Law of Moses.” In the scrolls, the disjunction that Jeremiah envisions between the old and new covenants is absent since it is precisely the covenant with Moses that is being renewed.  

Second, Jeremiah’s expectation that God’s role would be more pronounced in the new covenant age is also lacking in Qumran. Instead, one finds an increased emphasis upon human effort.

Consider the following passage from the Rule of the Community:

No man shall walk in the stubbornness of his heart so that he strays after his heart and eyes and evil inclination, but he shall circumcise in the Community the foreskin of evil inclination and of stiffness of neck that they may lay a foundation of truth for Israel, for the Community of the everlasting Covenant (1QS 5.4-6, trans. Vermes).

---


412 1QS 5.8-9 (trans. Vermes).

413 Evans, “Qumran Literature,” 59, 79; Martin G. Abegg. “The Concept of the Qumran Sectarians,” in The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period, 84. If there is anything “new” being imparted in the Qumran covenant, it resides in the “hidden things,” or their authoritative interpretation of Torah. See Ibid., 85-8.
In the Qumran scrolls, Jeremiah’s emphasis on God’s transformation of the covenant partner has receded before a burgeoning emphasis on the human partner. As a result, scholars have concluded that the Qumran community did not believe that they were living in the age of fulfillment, but were rather the faithful remnant that was fulfilling God’s original covenant with Moses. Their fidelity and loyalty to the covenant would eventually precipitate the final eschatological age where God would restore the faithful in Israel.

While one does not find expectations of a future covenant that surpasses the one from Sinai like one sees in Jeremiah and the other prophets, the Qumran texts reveal that Israel’s history is one of covenant renewal. When Israel’s sin ruptures the covenant, God is willing to renew the covenant when Israel responds in repentance and humility. The community continued this pattern and saw themselves as the part of Israel that was serious about being faithful to God’s covenant. The prophetic texts and several of the other texts from the intertestamental time period anticipated a new covenant being made in the eschatological era. It would be an eternal, unbreakable covenant wherein YHWH would transform his covenant partners. Though this eschatological covenant would surpass the previous covenants, it continued Israel’s pattern of repeated covenanting with God.


Israel’s history of breaking the covenant throughout her history implied that Israel on her own was impotent to produce the new obedience anticipated in the new covenant. As a result,

---

416 Some have argued that Jeremiah’s covenant was never understood as a radical break with the former one since every covenant renewal had elements of continuity and discontinuity. If this is the case, then the Qumran community could lay claim to being inheritors of Jeremiah’s covenant. However, even Tan who suggests this possibility still admits that the Qumran community never appropriated the language of Jeremiah and still expected a future renewal of the covenant during the eschatological age. See Kim Huat Tan, The Zion Traditions and the Aims of Jesus, Society for New Testament Studies 91 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 209-15.
Israel’s prophets anticipated a future work of divine transformation that would produce the heightened obedience. In order for this to happen, YHWH would have to become more directly involved with the transformation of his covenant partner. Ezekiel, for instance, looked forward to a time when YHWH would take on a more active role by fulfilling the following promise: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit (הַרוּחַ) I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:25-6). In this passage, YHWH promises to change the object of Israel’s affections by giving them a new spirit and a new heart. In the context of Ezekiel the removal of the “heart of stone” symbolizes the cessation of idolatry. Elsewhere, Ezekiel describes Israel as worshipping the gods of “wood and stone” (Ezek 20:32) and as having taken “idols into their hearts” (Ezek. 14:4).417 Speaking metaphorically, Israel’s heart had turned into the object of its affection: stone idols.418 Only a work of divine transformation could alter what their hearts had become. Moreover, only a living God who has “breath” or “spirit”—something that the idols lacked—could reverse Israel’s ossified spiritual condition.419 For Ezekiel, the impartation of the divine “spirit” or “breath” would transform God’s covenant partner, so they would fulfill the covenantal expectations.

Perhaps one of the most vivid prophesies about Israel’s future restoration and the impartation of the divine spirit can be found in Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of the dry bones. In this vision, the seer is brought before a valley of desiccated skeletons and asked, “Mortal, can

418 An excellent study on the biblical understanding of how worshipping idols adversely affects the worshipper, as Ezekiel demonstrate here, is G. K. Beale, We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008).
419 Kutsko, Heaven and Earth, 136. For the “breathlessness” of idols, see Jer. 10:14.
these bones live?” (Ezek. 37:3). The seer is then instructed to prophesy to the bones, telling them that God would impart his “breath (יָהוָ֣ה)” to them (Ezek. 37:5) and quicken them. As he watches, sinews attach to the bones, then flesh and skin cover the skeletons, and finally the divine breath revivifies them. The text interprets the vision in the following commentary:

Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord” (Ezek 37:11-14).

In the light of the larger collection of oracles in Ezekiel, this vision is important for it inverts the earlier prophecy of doom against Israel where YHWH promised: “I will lay the corpses of the people of Israel in front of their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars” (Ezek. 6:5). The idols had failed to save them from the exilic punishment, leaving them in the despair of death and exile. YHWH alone possessed the power of restoring them to their homeland, which is captured in the metaphor of resurrection.

While the prophecy of Ezekiel 36 simply spoke of a “new spirit” being given to Israel, Ezekiel 37 clearly identifies this spirit as YHWH’s when he promises: “I will put my spirit within you” (Ezek. 37:14). The presence of the divine spirit and its role in restoring life to the dead is an echo of the creation accounts where the Spirit of God hovers over the primordial waters (Gen. 1:2) and breathes life into Adam (Gen. 2:7). In a similar fashion, Israel’s restoration would constitute an act of God’s creative power as he created her anew. The experience of exile and restoration utilized the metaphor of resurrection to capture God’s

---

intervention on Israel’s behalf. Israel’s death in the exile would be overturned in her resurrection when God restored Israel to the land of promise (Ezek. 37:12). Through the impartation of his Spirit, YHWH would root out the love for idols in Israel’s hearts and breathe life into his people once more.

In the minor prophet Joel, one finds a similar expectation. After God restores his people, YHWH promises, “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28-9). Joel’s emphasis upon the divine spirit seems to run in a different direction than Ezekiel’s. Whereas Ezekiel emphasizes the divine spirit’s transforming work, Joel emphasizes the role that the divine spirit played in prophesy. Nevertheless, both Joel and Ezekiel foretell of an increased role of the divine spirit in the age of Israel’s restoration when YHWH would impart his spirit to his people.

3.B.4. *New Temple*

The Jerusalem temple, the central symbol of Jewish religious life, was not immune to the decimation of the exilic experience. When the Babylonians invaded the Southern Kingdom for the final time, they pillaged the temple, stripped it of its gold, and left it in a pile of ruins. This state of affairs would not continue indefinitely, and the prophets, along with a host of post-exilic writers, expected the Jerusalem temple to be rebuilt when God restored his people to their land. Probably the most expansive example of the hope for a new temple can be found in Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple (Ezek. 40:1-44:3) with its extremely precise measurements for every component of the temple. Ezekiel, however, was not alone as a wide array of texts exemplifies
an expectation that the temple itself would be rebuilt in splendor as observed in other prophetic texts.

The later portions of Isaiah record several oracles anticipating the temple’s rebuilding. For example, Isaiah 44:28 reads: “Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb … who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid’” (Isa. 44:28). In addition, there is an expectation that those outside the covenant would also be able to worship in the temple. It was to be a “house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa. 56:7) and “the flocks of Kedar” and the “rams of Nebaioth,” basically the animals belonging to the people of Ishmael, “shall be acceptable on my altar” (Isaiah 60:7). Micah also has a similar expectation: “In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come…” (Micah 4:1-2a). Thus, the prophetic texts anticipate a time when the temple, though toppled by the Babylonians, would be rebuilt into an edifice where Israel and the nations could worship YHWH.

The intertestamental literature continues to reverberate with various permutations of this expectation as well. Tobit, for instance, anticipates a future rebuilding during the time of restoration:

But God will again have mercy on them … and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfillment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth. They will all abandon their idols, which deceitfully have led them into their error; and in righteousness they will praise the eternal God (Tobit 14:5-7a).

---

421 In addition to the passages mentioned here, see Isaiah 56:1-6; 60:13, 20.
422 Deuteronomy 23:1-8 forbids eunuchs and certain foreigners from coming into the temple. This text in Isaiah undoes the earlier prohibition. According to Westermann, this revolutionizes the idea of God’s people. See Westermann, Isaiah, 305.
Tobit pictures the restoration of Israel, the time of “mercy,” as coterminal with the rebuilding of the temple. The seer of 1 Enoch also envisions “that ancient house being transformed” and the edification of “a new house, greater and loftier than the first one,” which will be built “in the first location which had been covered up—all its pillars were new, the columns new; and the ornaments new as well as greater than those of the first, (that is) the old (house) which was gone” (1 En. 90:28-9; OTP 1:71). The Sibylline Oracles also possess a dream where “the temple will again be as it was before” (Sib. Or. 3.294; OTP 1: 368).

The expectation of a new temple appears in a myriad of texts, indicating it was widespread during the era. For some, the temple is simply rebuilt, but many of them make the point that the new temple will be loftier and more glorious than the former. Its glory and its splendor would be unsurpassed. Moreover, in some of the texts, the eschatological temple is no longer simply for the Jewish people. Instead of being exclusively the property of Israel, the temple welcomes “foreigners” and other “peoples” into its courts (Isa. 56:7; Mic. 4:1-2). When some of these texts include the Gentiles in their eschatological vision, we see the promise to Abraham—by whom God would bring blessing to all the nations—returning to a prominent place in Israel’s story. Her vocation as God’s means of blessing the world would occur when God acted to vindicate his name and rebuild the temple. For some of these texts, in the age of restoration, Israel and the Gentiles would be united in their common worship of Israel’s God.

Finally, a point worth mentioning in light of the theological questions we are temporarily holding

---

423 Again, another passage in the same text says, “At its completion, they shall acquire great things through their righteousness. A house shall be built for the Great King in glory for evermore” (1 Enoch 91:13; OTP 1:73).
424 Other texts are in support of the expectation as well. For instance, Jubilees contains the following: “And afterward … I shall build my sanctuary in their midst, and I shall dwell with them. And I shall be their God and they will be my people truly and rightly” (Jubilees 1.15a, 17; OTP 2:52). In the Temple Scroll at Qumran (11QT), it was believed that the eschaton would welcome a new sanctuary, after the present one was cleansed. The following passage demonstrates this expectation: “I will cause my glory to rest on it until the day of creation on which I shall create my sanctuary, establishing it for myself for all time according to the covenant which I have made with Jacob in Bethel” (11QT 19.10, trans. Vermes).
in abeyance, the fact that some of the prophets envisioned sacrifices being offered in the eschatological temple indicates that, whatever one does with the prophetic critique of sacrifice, it cannot be taken as a wholesale indictment and annulment of the entire system.

3.B.5. *Eschatological Ruler*[^425]

If God were to restore the exiles to their homeland in order to inhabit the land freely, then there would have to be a political structure to safeguard the peace of Israel and Judah. Thus, the hope that God would raise up a righteous ruler in the coming renewal of Israel is logically integrated with the other hopes for restoration. Moreover, if Israel had suffered the exile because their leadership abrogated the covenant, then the eschatological reconstitution would need a righteous ruler who would not only defend the people from their enemies but foster faithfulness to YHWH.

The Old Testament affirmed that God had chosen a particular dynasty to lead his people, and the origins of an expectation for an eschatological ruler likely have their foundation in YHWH’s covenant with David. In 2 Samuel 7, YHWH makes a personal covenant with David saying,

> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house

[^425]: Because the language of “messiah” can be restrictive when texts not using the term are excluded or too ambiguous since the word can refer to multiple roles and offices in ancient Israel, I have adopted the language of “eschatological ruler” to capture more accurately the essence of this particular hope for restoration. Regarding the pluriform nature of messianic expectation in Second Temple Judaism, see John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 18 which identifies four different messianic paradigms that appear during this time: “king, priest, prophet, and heavenly messiah.”
and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12-6).426

The covenant with David affirms several things: 1) David’s royal descendants possess a filial relationship with God; 2) the construction of the Temple (i.e. a house for God) is the responsibility of David’s descendent; 3) when David’s son disobeys, he will be subject to divine discipline; and 4) regardless of how much discipline might be needed, David’s dynasty would remain. The latter point probably proved to be generative of the hope that God would raise up an eschatological ruler for his people, for if David’s dynasty were to remain in spite of discipline, it would be resumed after the exile.

In light of the covenantal promises made to David, it only seems reasonable that, when God acted to restore his people to their homeland in freedom, then God would also reinstate the Davidic dynasty over them.427 This is precisely what one finds in a host of texts starting with the prophets and continuing on into the later portions of the Second Temple era. The Isaianic oracles speak of the future coming of the “root of Jesse” (Isa. 11:10)428 or the day when “(a) shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse… (Isa. 11:1-2). This future descendant of David will come in the era of restoration: “When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and marauders have vanished from the land, then a throne shall be established in steadfast love in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler who seeks justice and is swift to do

427 I do not wish to become overly embroiled in the debates about the date at which the messianic expectation emerged. Joseph Fitzmyer has articulated a very limited definition in order to identify a particular text as messianic. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The One Who is to Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 47-8. In my opinion, his definition is much too limited and, at points, fails to see how several of these texts would be generative or even indicative of a messianic expectation. Fitzmyer, for example, does not think the exilic hope for a new Davidic king is messianic simply because texts like Jer. 30:8-9 do not describe David’s coming descendant as a “Messiah.” While this might be an important distinction, it still overlooks the fact that kings were anointed for their role. As a result, it seems counter-intuitive to argue that a coming Davidic king could not be considered a “Messiah” just because the exact term is absent. Certainly the concept of an anointed one would be implicit.
428 Though some interpreters have interpreted this text as anticipating a post-exilic community, the evidence suggests that it should be taken as a kingly figure. See Jake Stromberg, “The ‘Root of Jesse’ in Isaiah 11:10: Postexilic Judah or Postexilic Davidic King?” *JBL* 127, no. 4 (2008): 655-69.
what is right” (Isaiah 16:4b-5). Jeremiah anticipates the future coming of the “Branch,” someone from David’s line (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15). This coming king would reign righteously: “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land…. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness’” (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

For Ezekiel, David would again “shepherd” the people and be the “prince” of Israel (Ezek. 34:23-4; 37:24-5). The minor prophets also look forward to God’s restoration of “the booth of David” (Amos 9:11), the installment of “David their king” (Hosea 3:5), and the birth of the ruler in Bethlehem, David’s hometown (Micah 5:2). Thus, the hope for the coming eschatological ruler, especially a Davidic ruler, is quite prominent in the prophetic corpus.

The intertestamental literature reiterates this hope in a number of places. The Psalms of Solomon expect a day when the “Messiah will reign” (Pss. Sol. 18.5; OTP 2:669) and when God would “raise up for them their king, the son of David…. And he will be a righteous king over them … and their king shall be the Lord Messiah” (Pss. Sol. 17.21-2, 32; OTP 2:667). The Testament of Judah, enlisting language reminiscent of the biblical prophets, believes from the line of Judah there will arise “the Shoot of God Most High” (T. Jud. 24.4; OTP 1:801). The Sibylline Oracles do not provide the lineage of the future king but simply say that “then God will send a King from the sun who will stop the entire earth from evil war, killing some, imposing oaths of loyalty on others; and he will not do all these things by his private plans but in obedience to the noble teachings of the great God” (Sib. Or. 3.652-6; OTP 1:376). 2 Baruch also

---

429 In the context of Jeremiah 33:15, the reason for expecting a future Davidic king lies in the Davidic covenant’s promise that David would always have a son to sit on the throne (Jer. 33:17, 21).
430 Michael F. Bird, Are You the One Who is to Come?: The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 39. Here the “righteous Branch” is contrasted with Zedekiah’s failure to promote righteousness as the meaning of his name would suggest (“Righteousness of Yahweh”).
431 Scholars have long noted that the text, as we have it, appears to be a later Christian redaction of the document. Thus, this portion might be a Christian interpolation.
expects an “Anointed One” who will mete out justice upon evildoers (2 Bar. 40:1-2; OTP 1:633). The explicitly Davidic lineage of the coming “Messiah” is again present in 4 Ezra: “... this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David, and will come and speak to them; he will denounce them for their ungodliness and for their wickedness, and will cast up before them their contemptuous dealings” (4 Ezra 12:32; OTP 1:550). Thus, many of the intertestamental books continue to preserve a hope for an eschatological ruler and many of them continue to affirm the Davidic lineage that such a claimant must have.

The messianic expectation at Qumran is a bit more complicated, for it seems that there was a hope for a royal figure alongside of a priestly one. This twofold nature of their messianic expectation trades upon the ambiguity of the Hebrew word for Messiah (מֶשְׁכָּח), which simply designates someone who is anointed. In ancient Israel, priests and kings were anointed offices and each could be justifiably given the label. Several of the scrolls indicate that the Qumran community expected at least two “Messiahs” in the eschatological renewal of Israel. For example, the Rule of the Community anticipates the coming of “the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.” The two figures, though different people, would serve different roles in Israel’s restoration. The “Messiah of Aaron” would be a new high priest who would lead religious reforms, and the “Messiah of Israel” would be a royal, political figure. While some Qumran texts simply talk about a messianic figure, others emphasize the Davidic lineage of the

---

432 Other allusions to the Messiah in 2 Baruch are: 2 Baruch 29:3; 39:7; 70:9; 72:1-6.
433 1QS IX, 11 (trans. Vermes); Cf. 1QSa II, 11-21. However, the expectation of two separate figures, one religious and one political, is not present in all texts. The Damascus Document looks for a singular religious figure, “the Messiah of Aaron” (CD 12.22).
eschatological ruler by utilizing the prophetic label, “Branch of David.”435 One of the most explicit texts on the subject affirms the Davidic covenant and anticipates a Messiah from David’s line:

The scepter [shall not] depart from the tribe of Judah… [xlix, 10]. Whenever Israel rules, there shall [not] fail to be a descendant of David upon the throne (Jer. xxxiii, 17). For the ruler’s staff (xlix, 10) is the Covenant of kingship, [and the clans] of Israel are the divisions, until the Messiah of Righteousness comes, the Branch of David (4Q252 fr. 1, 5.1-6, trans. Vermes).

Other texts simply allude to a “Messiah” that will inaugurate the eschatological renewal by the power of the divine spirit, without specifying his lineage.436 Sometimes, there is no mention of a “Messiah” but simply an allusion to a future political ruler.437 Despite the twofold nature of Qumran’s messianic expectation, they—as many others during the late Second Temple era—still anticipated an eschatological ruler from the Davidic dynasty who would defeat Israel’s enemies and lead his people to serve God in righteousness.438

Josephus also reminds us that messianic hopes were alive and active in the first century. Part of what precipitated the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66 CE was “an ambiguous oracle that was also found in their sacred writings, how, ‘about that time, one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth.’”439 Without getting sidetracked into the intractable debates over which prophetic text was in view, the point is that we have evidence from a Jewish author that such an expectation was alive and well past the midpoint of the first century.

---

435 4Q174 I, 11-2; 4Q285, fr. 7; 4Q161 Frs. 8-10.
436 4Q521.
437 1Q28b(1QSb) 5 speaks of a future “Prince of the Congregation” that will establish the covenant and rule in righteousness. Likewise CD 7.19 alludes to the “Prince of the whole congregation.”

135
In addition, Josephus mentions a number of insurrectionists who led unsuccessful rebellions against the Romans. Theudas, whom Josephus calls a “magician,” took his people to the Jordan River and, in the manner of Moses and Joshua, promised to divide the river. However, before he could carry out his intentions, the procurator decapitated him. There was also the anonymous Jew from Egypt who claimed to be a prophet capable of felling the walls of Jerusalem and conquering the Roman garrison. The Romans also brought him to a swift end. In a similar fashion, Athronges assumed political authority for a time, even though he mainly waged guerilla warfare on the occupying Roman force. Other figures like Menahem and Simon bar Giora also arose and asserted political authority as a result of their short-lived victories and postured themselves as delivering kings. While we do not possess evidence that these figures claimed to be a Messiah, the promise of disassembling the walls of Jerusalem and dividing the Jordan river evoke images of Joshua’s conquest of Canaan and suggest at least some of these individuals believed they were going to fulfill the hopes for a new exodus by leading a “new conquest of the land” as a political leader of sorts.

The above texts indicate that there was a widespread expectation that God’s restoration of Israel would occur under the leadership of a Messianic figure who was often, though not always,
understood to be a descendent of David. This figure would deliver Israel by conquering her enemies and ruling in righteousness. At the same time, we need to refrain from supposing that all Jews in the Second Temple period expected a Davidic king or shared a similar understanding of the coming Messiah. The belief, for example, seems conspicuously absent from some post-exilic texts like Ezra-Nehemiah. Likewise, the evidence of a belief in two Messianic deliverers at Qumran indicates that the Messianic expectation existed in different permutations. To be safe, we should abstain from assuming the hopes for a messianic deliverer were a monolithic whole that unequivocally describes all Jews during this time period. With this caveat in place, though, one can still say that such a belief was apparently well known and pervaded much of the Jewish world of the first century. As Collins concludes, there was a “common core” to the messianic expectation that saw “the Davidic messiah as the warrior king who would destroy the enemies of Israel and institute an era of unending peace…”

---

445 Some scholars suggest that messianic expectation waned between the “early fifth to the late second century BCE” (Collins, Scepter and the Star, 51). Fitzmyer argues it really only emerges in the second century BCE within the book of Daniel (Fitzmyer, One Who is to Come, 62). However, as Collins notes, there is very little evidence coming from this time period to give us an accurate picture of what beliefs were commonly held (Collins, Scepter and the Star, 40). In fact, the little evidence that is Collins must explain away as a later insertion. While his assessment of Sirach is convincing, his assessment of the Sibylline Oracles is not. His equation of the “King from the sun” (Sibylline Oracles 3.652) with one of the Egyptian kings is tenuous and overlooks the association with Jerusalem that is present in the surrounding context, especially with an anticipated assault on the Jerusalem Temple (Collins, Scepter and the Star, 46-9). Even if the text mirrors the Potter’s Oracle as Collins observes, this does not preclude the author from adopting such language in order to situate his expectation of a future Jewish king. Moreover, Collin’s decision to see Jer. 33:14-16 as a later interpolation into Jeremiah’s text also undermines this thesis (Ibid., 29; cf. Ibid., 37). Due to the fact that contrary evidence must be explained away and because sufficient evidence is lacking in order for us to make solid assertions here, arguing that messianic expectation fell into disuse during this time is tenuous, though not impossible.

446 Greg Goswell, “The Absence of a Davidic Hope in Ezra-Nehemiah,” Trinity Journal 33, no. 1 (2012): 19-31. The question is whether the absence is due to a desire to appease the Persian rulers or whether it reflects an actual lack of emphasis on the eschatological deliverer. Arguments from silence can be tendentious, though. The same argument is made on the basis of 1 and 2 Maccabees. See Jonathan A. Goldstein, “How the Authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees Treated the ‘Messianic’ Promises,” in Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era, ed. Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 69-96.

447 Wright, New Testament and the People of God, 308.

448 Collins, Scepter and the Star, 78.
3.C. The Enduring Exile

The above texts have identified the ways in which various authors anticipated God’s future restoration from exile. While it is difficult to determine the degree to which the average person held these beliefs, the widespread occurrence of these beliefs in diverse texts and genres suggests the above examples do not represent isolated phenomena but a tradition representative of a wider portion of the people. To summarize, they expected God to bring them back from exile in a new exodus and raise up an eschatological ruler to procure political peace. In addition to a renewed political situation, God would also re-establish his relationship with them by inaugurating a new covenant, imparting his Spirit into them so they would fulfill the covenantal stipulations, and rebuilding the temple for them to resume the worship of YHWH as prescribed in Torah.

Historically speaking, the exile of the Southern Kingdom did not last long. When the neo-Babylonian empire collapsed before the vanquishing Persians in 539 BCE, Cyrus the Persian king issued a decree sending the Jewish exiles back to their homeland to rebuild the temple.449 Certainly, Cyrus’ release of the exiles was a reversal of the exile, but did this return to the homeland constitute a complete fulfillment of the hopes for Israel’s restoration? Did the state of exile end when Cyrus utters his decree for the Jews to return?

In this section, I will maintain the thesis that, though aspects of the hopes for restoration came true with the return under Cyrus, there is enough post-exilic evidence to conclude that the Jewish people believed the exilic state continued and restoration had not been completely fulfilled even after they returned and began rebuilding their land and temple under the Persians. To put it another way, though the Jewish people enjoyed a modicum of freedom under the Persians and subsequent empires, they did not believe they had entered into the era of the

---
promised deliverance. This thesis is not original with me, but has been advanced already by N.T. Wright who makes it the basis of his provocative reconstruction of the historical Jesus.\textsuperscript{450} Since some scholars have questioned Wright’s presupposition that many Jews of the first century viewed themselves as still being in “exile,” it is worth reviewing the evidence in favor of it here.\textsuperscript{451}

Several of the books describing or speaking to the experiences of the Jewish people after Cyrus’ decree corroborates Wright’s thesis. For example, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah provide an insight into how the returning Jews viewed their existential situation under the Persians. Ezra categorizes the Jewish people as “slaves” since, though they had returned to the ancestral lands, they still were subjected to foreign powers (Ezra 9:9). A similar affirmation is made in Nehemiah when Ezra comments on the context of his people after the return: “Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts” (Neh. 9:36).\textsuperscript{452} These passages reveal that, even though they had physically returned

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[450]{Wright, New Testament and the People of God, 268-72, 299-301; idem, Jesus and the Victory of God, 126-7, 203-9, 268-74.}
\footnotetext[451]{For some of the critiques, see Ivor H. Jones, “Disputed Questions in Biblical Studies: Exile and Eschatology,” ExpTim 112 (2001): 400-405; Maurice Casey, “Where Wright is Wrong: A Critical Review of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God,” JSNT 69 (1998): 95-103; James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus and the Kingdom: How Would His Message Have been Heard?” in Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen, ed. Peder Borgen, et al., Supplements to Novum Testamentum 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3-36; and idem, ‘Review of Jesus and the Victory of God,” JTS 49, 2 (1998): 727-34, esp. 730-1. In the latter review, Dunn refers to texts like Sirach 50 in order to challenge Wright’s view. While Sirach 50 certainly celebrates the presence of a new and glorious temple, it still betrays the hope that the Jewish people long for more. In the ostensibly corporate prayer recorded at the end of the chapter, the congregation prays, “May he give us gladness of heart, and may there be peace in our days in Israel, as in the days of old. May he entrust to us his mercy, and may he deliver us in our days!” (Sirach 50:23-4). In the end, the people still see a need for deliverance and for God’s mercy, which indicates that, though the temple was rebuilt, the fullness of restoration had yet to dawn.}
\footnotetext[452]{This same view of a continuing exile is reflected in 1 Esdras too. Here another prayer of Ezra says the same thing: “O Lord, I am ashamed and confused before your face. For our sins have risen higher than our heads, and our mistakes have mounted up to heaven from the times of our ancestors, and we are in great sin to this day. Because of our sins and the sins of our ancestors, we with our kindred and our kings and our priests were given over to the kings of the earth, to the sword and exile and plundering, in shame to this day” (1 Esdras 8:74b-77). Ezra goes on to speak of the favor granted by the Persians, which would include the return granted under Cyrus. Thus, the book, which was written in the late second century BCE continues to affirm that the return under Cyrus did not fully remove their state of exilic punishment nor guilt. For the date, see Harold W. Attridge, “Historiography,” in Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo,
to the land, their physical return was at best only a partial fulfillment of the promises for restoration. Because the Persians retained political authority, they were nothing but slaves. The viewpoint of Ezra and Nehemiah points to the exile continuing past the literal removal from the land. The experience of exile had now morphed into being a slave in one’s own land.

Similarly, the book of Tobit, a story set in the Assyrian exile, utilizes the familiar trope of Jews being faithful to YHWH in exile in order to speak to the existential situation of Jews living hundreds of years later. The book itself is usually dated between 225-175 BCE. The fact that it addresses a post-exilic community suggests a presupposed elongation of the exile, for it borrows on the metaphor of exile in order to encourage Jews living under foreign domination. In the book, there are numerous references to a future change of fortunes when YHWH “will again show mercy” on his people (Tobit 13:5). Probably the most explicit is Tobit 14:5 where Tobit prophesies:

But God will again have mercy on them [Israel and Judah], and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfillment shall come. After this they all will return from exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it.

Here the author, who is situated several centuries after the initial return to the land, still anticipates a future fulfillment of the prophets’ message.

---


454 Some further nuance could be needed on this point. The book of Tobit emphasizes the exilic state of being outside of the land. As a result, even though one can emphasize its post-exilic origins, it seems likely that the texts here describe those outside the land after the original return rather than those who had returned and were living in the land. On this points, see Steven Weitzman, “Allusion, Artifice, and Exile in the Hymn of Tobit,” *JBL* 115, no. 1 (1996): 49-61. If this caveat is warranted, then we see something different than the slave-in-one’s-own-land idea that was present in Ezra and Nehemiah. The text is speaking to those who are literally exiled or outside of the land.
In addition, Daniel 9 also demonstrates a belief that the exile continues past the return under Cyrus. The chapter begins with Daniel contemplating the words of Jeremiah that promised seventy years of exile (Dan. 9:1-2). In the middle of confessing the sins of his people, Daniel is informed that the exile is not simply seventy years but "Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place" (Dan. 9:24). While the text is ambiguous and fails to identify whether these seventy weeks are days, months, or years, the most persuasive explanation sees them as years. As a result, the revelation to Daniel indicates the exile will last four hundred ninety years, which is long after the return to the land. In fact, the revelation given to Daniel only begins its reckoning of the four hundred ninety “from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:25b), which would certainly indicate the exile did not terminate with the return under Cyrus. Thus, Daniel’s elongation of the time period and his dating from the return to the land indicate that the exilic state endured past the return under Cyrus and well into what many typically consider the “post-exilic” era.

Baruch represents another non-canonical work that, like Tobit, was composed or reached its final form well after the return under Cyrus yet continues to use the setting of the literal exile to speak to the existential situation currently facing the Jewish people in the author’s day. For example, the apocryphal book of Baruch, which was likely completed sometime in the 160’s BCE, locates the story line in the Babylonian exile. In a penitential prayer that the Jewish

---

455 The prophecies in view are Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10.
458 For a probable dating in 164 BCE, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, “The Bible Rewritten and Expanded,” in Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period, 145-6. The book of Baruch is notoriously difficult to date for there
people were supposed to utter nationally, they confess “we are today in our exile where you have scattered us, to be reproached and cursed and punished for all the iniquities of our ancestors, who forsook the Lord our God” (Baruch 3:8). While the expression that “we are today in our exile” is certainly true for the fictive setting during the Babylonian exile, it is suggestive that a later author would include the prayer as a model for penance in his own day.

While it seems clear that several texts do not see the return under Cyrus as the fulfillment of Israel’s hoped for restoration or as the end of the exile, one could posit that the period of independence won by the Maccabees would constitute a time of such fulfillment. Perhaps the best case for defending the notion of an enduring exile comes from those texts written during and after the Hasmonean era. One of the most explicit supporting texts is the book of 2 Maccabees. In 2 Macc. 2:1-8, the author records one of the traditions regarding the ark of the covenant. According to this particular tradition, Jeremiah hid the ark of the covenant and other temple utensils when the Babylonians were invading Judea. According to the text, these temple instruments would remain hidden “until God gathers his people together again and shows his

may have been portions of the book written at different intervals. For dating some of the respective parts of Baruch, see Carey A. Moore, “Toward the Dating of the Book of Baruch,” CBQ 36, no. 3 (1974): 312-20.

459 Judith, which was completed during the Hasmonean era, suggests that the Jewish people could endure slavery in various places. It at least begs the question whether, like Ezra-Nehemiah, this could include slavery in one’s own land. Judith 8:22 says, “The slaughter of our kindred and the captivity of the land and the desolation of our inheritance—all this he will bring on our heads among the Gentiles, wherever we serve as slaves; and we shall be an offense and a disgrace in the eyes of those who acquire us.” In fact, Judith might have an intentionally anti-Hasmonean agenda. See Benedikt Eckhardt, “Reclaiming Tradition: The Book of Judith and Hasmonean Politics,” Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha 18, no. 4 (2009): 243-63. If Judith does possess an anti-Hasmonean agenda, it would provide another example where some people did not believe the Hasmonean era was the fullness of God’s restoration.


461 Like any ancient book, there are various dates ascribed to 2 Maccabees’ composition. Schwartz argues for an early date of 143-2 BCE. Daniel R. Schwartz, 2 Maccabees (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 3-15. However, the final form of the book has assimilated various pieces dating to different time periods, which lead some to conclude that the final redactor is a little later, though he likely used earlier sources. As a result, some have given a range from 77 BCE to the time of Nero for the date of the final form. See Harold W. Attridge, “Historiography,” in Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period, 176-8. Nevertheless, even a late date does not make the text irrelevant for the question at hand.
mercy” (2 Macc. 2:7), which indicates that the period of Jewish independence under the Hasmoneans did not fulfill the hopes for a new exodus or a complete return from exile.

Although the Maccabees do gain independence and purify the temple, there is never an argument in the text for the recovery of the temple artifacts interred by Jeremiah, nor are they used during the purification of the temple (2 Macc 10:1-8). In the letter to the other Jews, inviting them to celebrate the purification of the Temple (i.e. Hanukkah), there is more evidence that the fullness of restoration lays in the future from the vantage point of the author:

It is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration, as he promised through the law. We have hope in God that he will soon have mercy on us and will gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place, for he has rescued us from great evils and has purified the place (2 Macc. 2:17-18).

This text is important for realizing that, though the Jews had won their independence and resumed worship at the temple, the author does not believe they had yet entered into the period of restoration. God had yet to give them “mercy” and the new exodus, God’s ingathering of all the exiles, had not happened even though they appear to be on the cusp of such a great event. Thus, 2 Maccabees indicates that at least some people did not view the time of Jewish independence as the fulfillment of their hopes for Israel’s restoration, though their independence was certainly a step in the right direction.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which have provided a great deal of fodder for explicating the Jewish hopes for restoration, also originate during the Hasmonean and Roman eras. Even though radiocarbon dating on the scrolls has enough margin of error to preclude precise dating, the scrolls can be safely located “between 200 BCE and 70 CE.”462 In fact, it is unsurprising that the

---

462 Vermes, Dead Sea Scrolls, 14. For a more specific dating of the community’s existence, which has them, at best, continuing in a moribund existence in the first century, see Michael O. Wise, “The Origins and History of the Teacher’s Movement,” in The Oxford Handbook of Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. John J. Collins and Timothy H. Lim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), n.p. [cited 17 April 2014]. Online:
Qumran community did not believe the time of restoration had arrived during the Hasmoneans, for the sect was generated by the opposition between their founder, the Teacher of Righteousness, and the Hasmoneans who were purportedly meddling in the religious affairs of the temple and the priesthood.\textsuperscript{463} Still, the scrolls demonstrate that at least one group clearly did not identify the period of Jewish independence as a fulfillment of Israel’s hopes for restoration. How widespread this view was, one can only speculate. What is essential is that it existed in and during the Hasmonean era.\textsuperscript{464}

One can also marshal support from some of the prevailing ideologies that arise during the Hasmonean era, particularly the fervent increase in messianism that pervades the period.\textsuperscript{465}

Though I remain doubtful whether we can confidently say that messianism only emerged at this time, the fact that evidence for messianism abounds after the Jews regain control of the land suggests that they still anticipated a future deliverance at the hands of the Messiah even though they had gained political freedom.

When the Romans overthrow the fragile Jewish state in 63 BCE, one would expect the Jewish people to re-appropriate the thoughts and beliefs about their existential situation that were typical of the period under the Persians. They would once again be slaves in their own land. Such is, in fact, what one finds. In Josephus’ imploring speech, begging the last holdouts of the Jewish revolt against the Romans (66-70 CE) to surrender, he tells his audience that the Romans only gained control over Palestine because the former Jewish political rulers had sinned and

\[\text{http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.authenticate.library.duq.edu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199207237.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199207237.}\]

\textsuperscript{463} Vermes, Dead Sea Scrolls, 54-66; Collins, Scepter and the Star, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{464} Neusner suggests that even the Hasmonean dynasty could not be considered the fullness of restoration because it did not fulfill the expectations in Scripture. Jacob Neusner, Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Exile and Return in the History of Judaism (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 59.

\textsuperscript{465} Fitzmyer, One Who is to Come, 82-133. I personally question whether Joseph Fitzmyer has been too cautious in limiting the genesis of messianism to the second century BCE. However, Fitzmyer can make his argument because messianic expectations begin flourishing after the Jews win their independence from the Seleucids.
thereby brought Roman hegemony upon the people. In other words, Pompey’s invasion (63 BCE) inaugurated a new form of exilic punishment where Israel was receiving her just deserts, even if they remained in the land. From Josephus’ point of view, the Jews of Pompey’s day had sinned and, therefore, were again subjugated to a foreign power. The rebels of his day were running the same risks and would therefore likely face the same result. In addition, Josephus also tells us that some of the revolutionaries during the period of Roman control still equated Roman taxation with slavery. Despite the fact that the Romans periodically permitted Palestine semi-autonomous rule under various client kings, levying taxes to fund a foreign power could still be seen, as it ostensibly was under Ezra and Nehemiah, as tantamount to being serfs in the homeland.

One can also point to 4 Ezra, which dates to the end of the first century. In 4 Ezra 13:40-7 the author speaks of the existence of the ten northern tribes, which had been exiled under the Assyrians. Historically, these exiles had never returned to the land as did the two southern tribes under Cyrus of Persia. According to the author of 4 Ezra, the ten northern tribes existed in a land called Arzareth, a place beyond the Euphrates River. At some point in the future, “the

---

466 He specifically faults Aristobulus and Hyrcanus here for the demise of Israelite independence. However, Josephus also thinks that the new revolutionaries have sinned so egregiously that God now supports their enemies instead of them. See Josephus, *Wars* 5.395-419. Bryan, however, misses the import of this passage when he says that the passage, rather than being “proof” of a continuing exile under the Romans, is simply talking about the origins of Roman domination. See Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgment and Restoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15. Bryan fails to acknowledge that Josephus compares the revolutionaries of his present day to the generation of the Babylonian siege and says “the Jews of that age were not so impious as you are. Wherefore I cannot but suppose that God is fled out of his sanctuary, and stands on the side of those against whom you fight” (Josephus, *Wars* 5.411-2). Josephus is clearly invoking Deuteronomic theology, which threatened exile and defeat as punishment for sin, and is applying it to his current context. The paradigm of sin and punishment (as exile) is operative under the Romans as much as it was under the Babylonians. In fact, Josephus is warning that unless the revolutionaries repent, they will suffer a more brutal fate than the generation of the Babylonian exile. While I will concede that Josephus never identifies Roman subjugation as an experience of “exile,” it seems that the same interpretive paradigms are operative here in Josephus to explain the political situation under the Romans.

467 Josephus, *Ant.* 18.4: “[Y]et there was one Judas, a Gaulonite, of a city whose name was Gamala, who, taking with him Sadduce, a Pharisee, became zealous to draw them to a revolt, who both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery…” (trans. Whiston).

468 Date for this book is c. 100 CE. See OTP 1:520 and Michael E. Stone, “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, 412.
Most High will stop the channels of the river again, so that they may be able to pass over” (4 Ezra 14:47; OTP 1:553). The return of the northern tribes, as described in this text, mirrors the splitting of the Red Sea by Moses and the crossing of the Jordan River by Joshua. The imagery anticipates a future new exodus where God will bring his people back to the land. Moreover, one can also see that, though some of the Jewish people return under Cyrus the Persian, even well into the first century, some Jews believed that the exile was still a literal and historical experience for the ten northern tribes.469

At this point, we are in a position to reassess the various claims made about the notions of an “enduring exile” within the Jewish worldview of the Second Temple era. The notion has been challenged on several grounds. For one, the Jews did, in fact, return to the land of promise and worshipped at a reconstructed temple, so some critics have questioned how Jews living in the land could conceive of themselves as still in exile.470 Despite these observations, Wright’s notion of an enduring exile cannot be quickly discounted. Several people who adopt Wright’s notion of an enduring exile point out one can still speak of the exile continuing in a literal sense as long as it is used to refer to the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom who had not returned from exile.471 Yes, the exiles from the Southern Kingdom had returned to the land after being taken into exile by the Babylonians. Nevertheless, the exiles of the Northern Kingdom who had been exiled during the Assyrian conquest had yet to return.472 Since the exiles from the Northern

---

469 To this can be added evidence from Philo who, despite his strong penchant for allegory, exhibits the same expectation in the first century that the restoration of Israel lay in the future. Philo, De Praemis et Poenis, 165-8.

470 Casey, “Where Wright is Wrong,” 99-100; Dunn, “Jesus and the Kingdom,” 21-5; and Bryan, Israel’s Traditions, 13-4.


472 One can also note that some of the Jewish people were never exiled, and yet the exile of the few became an existential paradigm for later Jewish people. See Neusner, Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, 31; idem, “Exile and Return
Kingdom had never returned, one can legitimately argue that Jews in the first century would have viewed portions of their people as still literally residing in exile, even if that was not indicative of their personal experience.\textsuperscript{473} The evidence from 2 Maccabees and 4 Ezra suggests that at least some of the Jewish people believed this was an ongoing state for them as a people group during and after their political independence.

Other critics of Wright’s thesis have contended that the metaphor of exile loses its ability to capture the Jewish understanding of their historical situation after the return under Cyrus. Such critics contend that, though Wright is correct that Jewish writers continue to speak of their restoration as a future event, the metaphor of exile loses its potency as time goes on.\textsuperscript{474} For such critics, it is better to speak of a state of “non-restoration” rather than an ongoing exile. Though I agree that it is more encompassing and more accurate to describe the Jewish outlook in the first century as one of “non-restoration,” it is wrong to conclude that Jews in this time period “did not

\textsuperscript{473} Moreover, if we proceed with the understanding that the Jewish people of their time had a group-oriented personality where the individual’s experience was integrated into the experience of the community as a whole, it is not difficult to suppose that even those residing in the land would continue to think of their people, and hence themselves, as still experiencing exile. This is not to overlook the emerging emphasis upon the individual that occurs during this time, but to say that Second Temple Jews were much less individualistic than modern day interpreters. The Jews of the Diaspora paid the temple tax, and Palestinian Jews came to the defense of those living in other regions. Even the Romans punished all Jews across the empire with war reparations because they viewed the entire people as collectively guilty. Such a communal mindset could easily explain how a Jew living in the land could still view the people as collectively in exile even if only a portion of the population was still literally experiencing it. See Shaye J. D. Cohen, \textit{From the Maccabees to the Mishnah}, 2d ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 10-4.

\textsuperscript{474} Bryan, \textit{Israel’s Traditions}, 19. “The conclusion to be drawn from these texts which reflect on Israel’s state of bondage appears, then, to be exactly the opposite of that reached by Wright and Evans: not an expansion of exile to allow its use in an extended sense, but a reduction of the exile’s significance in order to ameliorate the difficulty created by the prophets’ close association of exile and redemption.”
often describe their situation” as an “ongoing exile.” All of the texts mentioned above that anticipated the re-gathering of God’s people, though not explicitly saying “we are still in exile,” certainly indicate a belief that portions of the Jewish people were still at large, having yet to return. In addition, if we follow Halvorson-Taylor in expanding the metaphor of exile to include “political disenfranchisement” and “a feeling of separation from God,” as Ezra-Nehemiah and some of the evidence from Josephus allows, then one does seem justified in broadening the metaphor of exile to include the situation under the Romans where they were again slaves in their own land. Though the metaphor of exile is not comprehensive enough to capture all that God would remedy in the age to come, it certainly remains a valid one into the first century. The range of textual evidence supports the affirmation that throughout the Second Temple period, even though several elements of the hopes for restoration had partially come to fruition, many of those promises had yet to be fulfilled and some of the ones that had been fulfilled were still incomplete. Among those incomplete promises was the full return from exile, which remains a valid metaphor among a matrix of other hopes for restoration that were, at the most, partially fulfilled. Perhaps instead of using the metaphor of “exile,” one is better suited in simply saying that, in the first century, Israel awaited the completion and fulfillment of its restoration.

---

475 Bryan, *Israel’s Traditions*, 13 (emphasis is his).
476 Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 1; cf. 203-4. Perhaps the most powerful criticism of the metaphorical use can be found in Bryan’s conclusion that the notion of exile was not expanded to include other hopes for restoration but was instead minimized as a more complex understanding for the hopes for restoration was born. See Bryan, *Israel’s Traditions*, 12-20. Still, if the literal sense of the term is valid as argued by Pitre and Dennis, then it seems that the return from exile still remains a valid metaphor into the first century.
477 According to Neusner, the pattern of exile and return became paradigmatic of all Judaisms since the experience of the exile was stamped across Israel’s sacred texts. If Neusner’s assertion is correct, that the experience of exile was not simply experienced but generated a consciousness adopted by others who never endured exile, then there is reason to apply the awareness of “exile” to those who had never experienced it literally for themselves. See Neusner, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*, 1-8.
This hoped for state of affairs can be described in various ways and with various metaphors, one of which is the return from exile, the new exodus.

3.D. Conclusion

This chapter began with the realization that every soteriology has a particular narrative structure that explains humanity’s need and how Jesus saves humanity from this plight. This particular chapter has contended that the need for salvation and restoration as developed in the Old Testament comprises Israel’s story of covenant with YHWH, the punishment of exile for breaking the covenant, and the hoped for restoration when YHWH would redeem his covenant partner. The intertestamental literature reveals that these hopes for restoration from exile continued into the first century and therefore provide a historical and theological context for Jesus’ ministry and the Synoptic Gospels. In the following chapter, we turn to the Synoptics in order to demonstrate that they situate Jesus within this very story of Israel’s exile and restoration. Thus, if one is to understand the saving significance of Jesus as proclaimed in the Synoptic Gospels and the cross and resurrection in particular, then it is imperative that Jesus be understood within this story and not one that is foreign to the Gospels.

CHAPTER 4: JESUS AS SAVIOR IN WHICH STORY (PART 2)?—THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL AS THE LEITMOTIF IN THE GOSPELS

In the previous chapter, we identified the various hopes for restoration that existed in the prophetic corpus of Israel’s sacred texts and how they were taken up by later Jewish writers during the Second Temple era. In the preceding section, I argued that these hopes and expectations for restoration remained operative throughout the Second Temple era and thus would be applicable to portions of the Jewish people during the first century. Though it is unlikely that these hopes for restoration were applicable to all first century Jews, one can suggest that a large number of the Jewish population would still be awaiting God’s restoration of his people, even if they differed on the exact nature of how this restoration would play out.

In this section, I argue that the Gospel writers draw upon Israel’s experience of exile and waiting for God’s restoration in order to define the “state of deprivation,” which Jesus remedies. When the Gospel writers identify Jesus as a saving figure, they do so by locating him within Israel’s larger narrative of waiting for restoration. As will be demonstrated, each of the Synoptics explicitly connects Jesus to the various hopes for restoration. For them, the story of Israel had progressed to a new era wherein her covenant God was making good on his promises. For them, Jesus is a saving figure because he releases Israel from her “state of deprivation.” As a result, Jesus is the climax and the culmination of a much longer story, one that the Gospel writers presume as the backdrop for their own particular narratives.
The following account is by no means meant to be exhaustive. There are many other allusions to restoration theology tucked away in various pericopes that go unmentioned here. The goal of the following data is to identify the most salient points of contact between the Synoptic presentation of Jesus and restoration theology. More of course can be said and written on the topic, but what is stated below is sufficient to demonstrate that the Synoptic writers see Jesus as a savior in light of the Jewish hopes for restoration.

4.A. Infancy Narratives

The Gospel of Mark begins with the adult ministry of Jesus and omits any reference to Jesus’ childhood or youth, focusing exclusively on the final period of his life. Matthew and Luke, on the other hand, both begin with the infancy of Jesus. While these two books provide a fuller picture of Jesus’ life by providing more information regarding his birth, the infancy narratives clearly situate Jesus within the larger story of Israel in several ways.

4.A.1. Matthew’s Genealogy

Matthew’s Gospel opens with the genealogy of Jesus, which reveals that Matthew finds Jesus’ family origins important for understanding who Jesus is and how his life impacts the world. When Matthew transcribes the ancestry from Abraham to Jesus, he identifies patterns within the genealogy, which help the reader understand the importance of Jesus. At the end of the list, the author identifies three series of fourteen generations: “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations” (Matt. 1:17). This segmentation, despite omitting several names at various points, demarcates
several epochs in the course of Israel. The first section of fourteen begins with Abraham and
ends with the monarch, “King David” (Matt. 1:6). The second segment goes from the united
monarchy to the Babylonian exile. With the passing of another set of fourteen generations, the
evangelist indicates that his reader should anticipate the next part of God’s divine activity,
namely, the restoration of Israel through his Messiah. Thus, the author is making the point
that those who have been waiting for the restoration of Israel should expect the final person in
the list, Jesus, to fulfill Israel’s hopes for restoration and introduce the next era in Israel’s story.

Identifying Jesus as the inaugural figure of a new era in God’s history of salvation seems
to be a certain point expressed in the opening genealogy, but there could in fact be more in view.
Scholars debate how the evangelist is using the number fourteen, especially when it seems to be
intentionally imposed upon the genealogy. One intriguing hypothesis is that the number
fourteen is intentionally chosen to draw further attention to Jesus’ connection to David. In the
practice of gematria, the letters of a person’s name are converted into numbers and then added
together. When the Hebrew letters of David’s name (דוד) are added together, they total
fourteen. If this is indeed why the author has chosen to divide the ancestry into sections of
fourteen, then we have another connection that links Jesus to David’s line, which he had already
done in the opening line by writing, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of
David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). The repeated emphasis drives home the point: Jesus is
a descendent of David and therefore heir to YHWH’s promises to David.

Matthew’s genealogy shows us several things. First, it reveals a belief that, with the
arrival of Jesus, the larger story of Israel is now advancing to the next stage. The age of the exile

479 W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According
480 For a different proposal than what is taken here, see Herman C. Waetjen, “Genealogy as the Key to the
481 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:63-5.
has come to a close and God’s time of restoration has now begun with Jesus as its central figure. Second, the repeated affirmation of Jesus’ connection to David reveals that Jesus bears the ancestry required to fulfill the expectation for a new Davidic king and Israel’s hope for an eschatological ruler.

4.A.2. Flight to Egypt

Nestled within the Matthean infancy narratives lies the escape to Egypt that is necessitated by Herod’s decision to annihilate the male children who could potentially threaten his kingdom (Matt. 2:13-23). Upon being warned in a dream, Joseph takes his little family to Egypt and returns to the homeland once Herod dies. By relating this story to his readers, the evangelist is drawing a comparison between Jesus and another prominent figure in Israel’s history, Moses. Like Jesus, Moses’ life was at risk because Pharaoh desired to kill all the baby boys in order to solidify political power (Exod. 1:15-22). As a result, his parents were forced to hide him. Later in life, Moses flees Egypt to save his life. The similarities here are not coincidental for the evangelist who wants us to see a similarity between Jesus and Moses.

Other comparisons between Jesus and Moses abound in Matthew, which have been summarized thoroughly in Dale Allison’s work, *The New Moses*. The comparison with Moses serves the evangelist’s desire to posture Jesus as the one who fulfills the Old Testament prophecies. Within Jewish tradition, there was an expectation that God would raise up a prophet like Moses.

---

484 Ibid. Another persuasive parallel occurs in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:1, Jesus “went up the mountain” prior to giving a revolutionary Sermon that heightened the commands of the Mosaic Law. It is no coincidence that Moses likewise ascended a mountain in order to receive the Law from God. See Ibid., 174-80. Another author who emphasizes the Moses-Joshua typology in order to categorize the kind of salvation Jesus brings is Andries G. van Aarde, “ἸΗΣΟΥΣ, the Davidic Messiah, as Political Saviour in Matthew’s History,” in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 7-31.
Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses himself indicates that God would some day raise up someone like Moses: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.” Interestingly, Deuteronomy ends with the ominous observation: “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10). Thus, although Deuteronomy expresses a hope for a future prophet like Moses, it affirms that there had not been such a prophet again. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the evangelist seizes upon this unfulfilled prophecy in order to show another way in which Jesus fulfills the Old Testament.

In light of this, the parallels with Moses suggest Matthew finds more behind the similarities. Moses, after all, was the person who led his people to liberation in the original Exodus. If we can presume that Israel possessed a consciousness that they were still waiting for a similar experience of salvation in their day, as N.T. Wright and others do, then we can assume that the comparison with Moses identifies Jesus as a saving figure as well. Allison, for instance, after analyzing all of the various ways Moses typology is present in Matthew, concludes that Matthew is intentionally casting Jesus as a new savior figure who will likewise lead his people to freedom. As he puts it, “… the story of Jesus is the story of a new exodus.”485 As a result, Jesus is the figure who stands at the climax of Israel’s story, for he is the one who fulfills their hopes and expectations.486

485 Ibid., 196.
486 Ibid., 272-4. He writes that for the author of Matthew “Jesus was not the unbegotten phantom of doceticism but the upshot of a history, Israel’s telos. Thus the newness we do encounter in Matthew is that of completion…” (Ibid., 273).

The opening chapters of Luke are steeped with restoration theology and the larger story of Israel. For example, the opening birth announcement to Mary identifies Jesus as “the son of the Most High” to whom God would give “the throne of his ancestor David” (Luke 1:32), establishing him as the Messianic redeemer in the line of David. In addition, the final line of Mary’s Magnificat extols God for being merciful to Israel “according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever” (Luke 1:55). This commentary indicates the birth of Jesus fulfills the Abrahamic covenant that anticipated God’s creational blessing flowing to the Gentiles, a group that becomes specifically designated as a recipient of these blessings later in Acts. Likewise, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, exclaims “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:68-9). Again the connection between Jesus and David is mentioned, solidifying Jesus’ identity as the messianic leader and the one who is to bring the redemption of God’s people. Like Mary, Zechariah also affirms that God “has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham” (Luke 1:72b-73a). Moreover, when Zechariah speaks of his son’s role in God’s eschatological program, he says “you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins” (Luke 1:76b-77). While

---


489 One should not overlook Luke’s egalitarian emphasis displayed here. A pattern emerges where a statement from a male is followed by a monologue by a female (i.e. Zechariah and Mary are first and then Simeon and Anna are the second pair). This is also followed throughout the rest of the book too. See Kenneth E. Bailey, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 59-60.
this picks up the language of Isaiah 40:3 that will be used to introduce John the Baptist later, it also ends with an allusion to the forgiveness of sins, which evokes the promises of the new covenant. This new era of salvation is when “… the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78b-9), which alludes to several passages from Isaiah that anticipate the coming restoration.

In the various monologues concerning Jesus and John the Baptist in the inaugural chapter of Luke, the author affirms that Jesus and his predecessor John usher in God’s era of restoration.

As Luke continues, there are repeated points of contact with restoration theology in the infancy narratives. When the angels announce Jesus’ birth to the shepherds, they identify him as “the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:11), again affirming his messianic role. When Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the Temple to be purified according to Mosaic law, they are greeted by Simeon who is “looking forward to the consolation (παράκλησιν) of Israel” (Luke 2:25). The “consolation of Israel” most certainly constitutes a euphemism for Israel’s restoration since the verb form παρακαλέω is found throughout Isaiah and signifies “the arrival of the eschatological era when God fulfills his promises to Israel (Isa. 28:29; 30:7; 57:18; 66:11).” Moreover, Simeon had been informed he was not to die until he had met the Messiah (Luke 2:26). After meeting the child, Simeon utters a brief monologue, which indicates all the things he had been waiting for were fulfilled by the infant Jesus: “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared

---

490 Likely allusions are to Isaiah 9:2, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined” and Isaiah 42:6c-7, “I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”

491 Within the larger narrative of Luke-Acts, the promise of a Davidic deliverer is not exclusively directed at Israel, but flows beyond them to engulf the Gentiles as well. This is the effect of the Davidic promise alluded to in Acts 15:15-8. See also, Tannenhill, “Lukan Narrative,” 328.

in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32). God’s salvation had arrived in the person of Jesus, and like the universal vision of many Second Temple texts, this salvation was not isolated to Israel but would encompass the Gentiles as well.493

After the encounter with Simeon, the author introduces Anna, a prophetess from Asher, who is elated about meeting the newborn Jesus and begins “to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). The word “redemption” had overtones of restoration as well. Coins minted during the Jewish revolts bore the term, and her excitement over the child indicates he plays a central role in God’s redemption of his people.494 Moreover, it is quite possible that our author believes Anna’s tribe of Asher is important since this was one of the northern tribes that still dwelt in exile.495 If so, this is just one more way in which the author of Luke opens his narrative about Jesus by recalling several of the eschatological hopes of Israel, particularly the hopes for a new Davidic king, the anticipated forgiveness of the new covenant, and the inclusion of Gentiles as beneficiaries of Israel’s restoration.

4.A.4. Summary

The infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke establish the trajectory that their particular narratives about Jesus will take. Most importantly, though, Matthew and Luke both see their

493 The Temple setting is likely significant here. Many of the texts expecting a reconstructed and glorified Temple believed that the Gentiles would then come to worship Israel’s God. The reference to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Temple provenance is likely indicating Jesus is fulfilling the eschatological role of the Temple.

494 Bauckham, “Restoration,” 451. For example, some of the coins bore the date corresponding to the year of the revolution in which they were minted. Some were stamped with “First year of the redemption of Israel.” See Frederic W. Madden, History of Jewish Coinage and of Money in the Old and New Testament (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967), 162 and 164. During the Maccabean revolt they also struck the word “redemption” on their coins (Ibid., 47). For corroborating evidence, see Mel Wacks, The Handbook of Biblical Numismatics from Abraham to the Crusaders (Houston: Israel Numismatic Service, 1976).

495 See Bauckham, “Restoration,” 458.
narratives about Jesus as the most recent chapter in God’s ongoing saga with Israel. Matthew and Luke do not stand on their own but rest upon the antecedent chapters that had been written in Israel’s canonical history. For Matthew, the promises to David and the subsequent exile form the background for his expectation that the fourteenth generation would give rise to a new era in which David’s line would resume its kingly authority. Moreover, just as Moses had led his people from bondage to freedom, even so Jesus performed the role of a new Moses who would also lead his people on the long expected new exodus. For Luke, God’s promises to Abraham meant he would act to restore his people and to raise up a new Davidic king who would bring God’s salvation to the world for Jews and Gentiles alike. With Jesus, the “consolation” and “redemption” of Israel had begun.

4.B. Calling of the “Twelve”

The belief that Jesus had a group of twelve disciples is widespread in early Christianity, appearing in the Gospels and a myriad of other texts. The Gospels, though attesting to other followers of Jesus, unequivocally affirm that Jesus had twelve specific followers designated as disciples.\textsuperscript{496} In addition, the creed which Paul recounts in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 indicates that there was a group known among early Christians as “the twelve.” While some have questioned the historicity of this number, many scholars have persuasively argued for its authenticity.\textsuperscript{497} As a result, we can assume that the tradition of the twelve disciples is not simply a literary reality but a historical one as well.

\textsuperscript{496} Matt. 10:1-5; 11:1; 19:28; 20:17; 26:14, 20, 47; Mark 3:16; 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32.
Moreover, this number appears to have had great significance for Jesus’ followers. Shortly after Judas’ suicide, the disciples gathered to pick a twelfth person to serve alongside of them, Matthias (Acts 1:15-26). It was apparently unacceptable to the post-Easter disciples to let their number stand at eleven. As C. K. Barrett notes, “The NT is more interested in the fact that the Twelve existed than in what they did.”

Though Acts does not fully explain the importance of the number twelve, we can conclude that Jesus’ followers deemed the number of great importance.

When we turn to the Gospels, we discover hints at the rationale for ensuring there were twelve disciples. Probably the most telling statement in the Synoptics is the Q saying where Jesus responds to Peter’s exclamation that they had forsaken everything to follow Jesus. Jesus replies to Peter, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal (παλιγγενεσίᾳ) of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28; cf. Luke 22:29-30). Here the logic behind the twelve disciples becomes apparent. The twelve disciples symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel. When he chose twelve disciples, Jesus was intentionally demonstrating that his ministry was focused on reconstituting Israel and inaugurating the age of restoration. Of course, this is not a literal fulfillment and we have no indication that there was a disciple from each of the tribes. Rather, the emphasis lies on the restoration of the nation as a whole, since it

499 Portions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs have a similar line of thought where the patriarchs are supposed to rule over their respective tribes (T. Jud. 25:1-2). Although fragmentary, 4Q164 also equates a group of twelve as the leaders of the tribes of Israel. The evidence from relevant Jewish literature shows that these statements would be assuming the authority over Israel and placing it on the shoulders of the apostles. This interpretation was also taken up by earlier Christian exegetes too. See Theophylact, Comm. Matt. on Matt. 10:1.
500 Meier, “Twelve,” 656-8; Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 300, 532; Allison, Constructing Jesus, 71, 232-3; and Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, 98, 233. Moreover, the use of the term παλιγγενεσίᾳ in reference to the restoration of Israel matches how the term is used in Josephus Ant. 11.66 for the return and restoration of Judah. On the use of this word in Josephus and the Gospels, see A.S. Geyser, “Jesus, the Twelve and the Twelve Tribes in Matthew,” in Essays on Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic, ed. A. S. Geyser (South Africa: Ntss, 1981), 16.
was composed of twelve tribes.\textsuperscript{501} In the longed for restoration, God would reassemble the twelve tribes together again. In selecting twelve disciples, Jesus was symbolically demonstrating that his ministry anticipated God’s restoration of Israel.

We see further proof of the symbolic nature of the twelve when Jesus commissions the twelve, sending them out in pairs with authority over unclean spirits to call others to repentance (Mark 6:7-13).\textsuperscript{502} While Mark and Luke do not show that this mission by the twelve was limited in scope, Matthew explicitly records Jesus making such restrictions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6).\textsuperscript{503} The focus for the twelve, at least before the death and resurrection of Jesus, is on the Jewish people, which is coherent with the expectation that they symbolically demonstrate Israel’s restoration. At the same time, Matthew’s Gospel was written from the vantage point of the Gentile mission (Matt. 28:19-20). It is worth noting that Matthew 10:5-6 inverts the order of the mission in Acts 1:8.\textsuperscript{504} A valid conclusion is that Matthew thinks, before Christ’s death and resurrection, the focus was on Israel. Only after Israel turned to faith could the Gospel be extended to the other peoples. Thus, although the choosing of the twelve does point to a special predilection for Israel, it does not rule out a future universal mission to the Gentiles who were to benefit from Israel’s restoration as well.\textsuperscript{505}

\textsuperscript{501} McKnight, “Jesus and the Twelve,” 228.
\textsuperscript{502} T. J. Rogers has successfully explained the injunctions against taking provisions for the journey and the rather enigmatic command to shake the dust off their feet when they are refused in light of expected norms of hospitality. See T. J. Rogers, “Shaking the dust off the Markan Mission Discourse,” \textit{JSNT} 27, no. 2 (2004): 169-92.
\textsuperscript{503} The exclusion of the Gentiles on this mission does beg for its authenticity as well since the mission to the Gentiles is presupposed by Matthew (Matt. 28:19-20). However, even in Matt. 10, the mission to the Gentiles is not entirely absent (e.g. Matt. 10:18). See Schuyler Brown, “The Mission to Israel in Matthew’s Central Section (Mt 9 34-11 1),” \textit{ZNW} 69, 1 (1978): 73-90.
\textsuperscript{504} Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 2:65-9. The order of Acts 1:8 is Jerusalem-Judea-Samaria-Gentiles. Here the prohibition runs Gentiles-Samaria-Israel, which inverts the order.
\textsuperscript{505} Lawrence Iwuamadi, “He Called unto him the Twelve and began to Send Them Forth”: \textit{The Continuation of Jesus’ Mission According to the Gospel of Mark} (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2008), 58-63, 253-5.
The calling of twelve disciples reveals that Jesus conducted his ministry as a Jewish restoration movement. His ministry focused on announcing the kingdom of God to the Jewish people, and he selected twelve individuals to demonstrate symbolically that his followers constituted a new Israel, one that would experience God’s promised restoration.

4.C. Jesus’ Proclamation of the “Gospel”

It is evident to many interpreters that the prophecies of Isaiah have influenced the Gospels. In fact, they likely derive the title of “Gospel” from Isaiah. Mark begins his work by labeling it the “good news (εὐαγγελίου)” of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1). Matthew, likewise, uses the word to capture the essence of Jesus’ message: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news (εὐαγγέλιον) of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23). In Luke, Jesus describes his mission as one of preaching the good news saying, “I must proclaim the good news (εὐαγγέλισασθαί) of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43). The Gospel writers utilize both the noun and verb forms of the same root to capture the essence of Jesus’ message.

In Second Isaiah, the LXX only uses the verb form of the word, but whenever it does, it is describing God’s saving activity on behalf of his people. Unsurprisingly, the Gospels often use εὐαγγέλιον to speak of the good news of God’s kingdom. Isaiah 52:7 describes the

---


510 All the uses appear in a verbal form: Isa. 40:9; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1.
announcement that God is king as heralding good news: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news (εὐαγγελίζω, ἀγαθά), who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” Because Second Isaiah contains a dense cluster of this word in the LXX and uses it in a similar fashion as the Gospels do, scholars have concluded that the use of “good news” in the New Testament, which is also translated as “gospel,” ultimately has its roots in Isaiah. This linguistic and ideological connection demonstrates that the Gospel writers believe the narratives they write about Jesus constitute the “good news” expected in Second Isaiah.

Not only does the term “gospel” have its roots in the Isaianic prophecies, but the Gospels also draw upon significant passages from Isaiah in order to frame the nature of the ministries conducted by John the Baptist and Jesus. Mark, the earliest of the Synoptics, opens his Gospel by writing, “As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, ‘See I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight’” (Mark 1:2-3). While Mark attributes the entire citation to Isaiah, the citation actually amalgamates several Old Testament passages into one. The first part of the quotation, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,” corresponds exactly to the LXX of Exodus 23:20 that introduces a section in which YHWH affirms that his messenger will lead the Israelites into the land of promise. Within the literary context of Exodus, the passage

---


512 Interpreting Old Testament citations in the New Testament is fraught with many questions. One can err in several ways. On the one hand, one can give too much weight and emphasis to the original context from which the citation is taken and not give enough credence to how the author takes up the citation in his new work. On the other hand, one can forego any importance of the original context, privileging the new context (here Mark) at the expense of the original one (Isaiah, Exodus, and Malachi). It is important to remain cognizant of the original context and use that context to the degree that the new work takes it up. At the same time, the meaning that such a quotation can have in its new context cannot be unnecessarily restricted. Moyise gives an appropriate word of caution here: Steve Moyise, “The Wilderness Quotation in Mark 1.2-3,” in Wilderness: Essays in Honour of Frances Young, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 78-87.
regarding the messenger is the concluding section of the Book of the Covenant and is situated before the covenant’s ratification in Exodus 24. 513

The second portion of the quotation, which identifies the messenger as the one “who will prepare your way,” reflects the Hebrew text of Malachi 3:1. While it is difficult to know how much of the original context of Malachi Mark would assume for his readers, the entire verse identifies the coming messenger as the mediator of the covenant: “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—not he is coming, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 3:1). It is tempting to press the connection with the covenant present in the context of Exodus 23 and Malachi 3 to conclude that Mark believed the messenger would inaugurate a new covenant. 514 However, since “διαθήκη” appears only once in the Gospel (Mark 14:24), the connection should not be overextended. What one can suggest, though, is that the anticipation of a new covenant was suffused into many of the prophetic texts that became paradigmatic for situating John the Baptist and Jesus in light of Old Testament expectations.

Despite attributing the entire citation in Mark 1:2 to Isaiah, only Mark 1:3 is directly from Isaiah 40:3. The citation only differs from the LXX of Isaiah 40:3 with the substitution of “his” (ἀὐτοῦ) in the place of “our God” (τοῦ θεοῦ ημῶν). Matthew and Luke follow Mark’s citation of Isaiah in their introduction to the Baptist’s ministry as well, with Matthew 3:3 repeating Mark’s


514 Mark, furthermore, never explicitly identifies the “messenger” with John the Baptist like some of the other Gospels, which means that it could ostensibly refer to Jesus instead. This is how Watts takes it. He writes “…the application of these texts to Jesus suggests that he is to be identified in some way, not so much with the Messiah, but with none other than the δοῦν and [messenger of the covenant] of Malachi and, in terms of Isaiah 40:3, the presence of Yahweh himself.” Rikki E. Watts, Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 87. However, the consensus appears to follow the other Gospels and identify John the Baptist as the messenger in Mark. See Adela Yarbro Collins, Mark: A Commentary, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 136-7.
emendation of Isaiah 40:3 verbatim. Luke also follows Mark’s emendation, but continues to cite a larger section from Isaiah 40, including 40:4-5 as well with slight alterations from the LXX text. Although Matthew and Luke do not include elements of Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 in their initial introduction to the Baptist’s ministry, they both include it later in their respective Gospels (Matt. 11:10; Luke 7:27), revealing that seeing the three texts as descriptive of the Baptist’s role was not exclusive to nor original with Mark.

The Synoptics’ use of Isaiah 40—especially Mark’s prominent citation of the passage in the opening verses—again points to the fact that the Synoptics are situating John the Baptist and Jesus within the larger story of Israel’s restoration. In fact, these very verses make the distinctive shift from Isaiah 1-39 to the second half, Isaiah 40-66. Old Testament scholars have long observed that Isaiah 40-66 possesses a more exuberant hope for the immediate future than one sees in the former section, Isaiah 1-39. Isaiah 39 ends with King Hezekiah being forewarned of the coming Babylonian exile (Isa. 39:5-8), whereas Isaiah 40 presupposes the Babylonian exile has occurred, and Babylon itself has either faced or soon will experience its demise. The second half of Isaiah, often called Second or Deutero-Isaiah, anticipates God’s imminent restoration of his people in glorious fashion. The opening verses of Isaiah 40 demonstrate this distinctive shift to the hope of a return from exile:

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for

---

515 John 1:23 also uses the Isa. 40:3 to describe John the Baptist.
517 Because of this marked distinction, scholars generally assume there is a different prophet responsible for the oracles and messages contained within the latter portion of the book. Moreover, many also make another division, designating Isaiah 56-66 as Third or Trito-Isaiah, though people like Westermann still see the latter portion as ideologically dependent upon the prophet “Deutero-Isaiah,” having been written by a disciple or a group of followers. See Westermann, *Isaiah*, 3-29. However, such rigid demarcations can no longer be wholly maintained without qualifications. See Seitz, *Isaiah*, 314.
518 Ibid., 316.
our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 40:1-5).

These opening verses of the latter portion of Isaiah indicate the former promises of judgment have run their course, and promises of comfort have supplanted the former oracles of destruction. The sins that led to the punishment of exile have been “paid.” Moreover, God appears to be reconciled with his faithless covenant partner. The opening pronouncement identifies Israel as “my people” and YHWH as “your God,” which is an abbreviated version of the covenant formula. Thus, God’s physical and political reconstitution of Israel after the exile coincides with a re-establishment of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel.

The ending portion of the passage (Isa. 40:3-5) speaks of forming a highway in the desert for God. This picks up on language used earlier in the book referring to God bringing his people back from exile (Isa. 35:8). While there are debates over whether the wilderness and desert are to be interpreted literally as the desert that separated the exiles in Babylon from their homeland or metaphorically as the spiritual condition of Israel, or both, Old Testament scholars agree that the language of flattening the mountains symbolizes the return from exile. Clearly, the opening verses of Isaiah 40 anticipate God’s intervention on Israel’s behalf in the New Exodus.

---

519 This passage was also influential in Judaism at the time. The Qumran community saw its study of the law as a means of preparing the way for YHWH. See 1QS 8.12-16.
520 Baltzer, Deutero-Isaiah, 49. The longer version is: “And you shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Jer. 30:22; cf. Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Ruth 1:16; Jer. 11:4; 32:28; Ezek. 36:28; 37:27). For more on the covenant formula throughout Scripture, see Baltzer, Covenant Formulary.
521 Isaiah 35:8, 10: “A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray… and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” See Childs, Isaiah, 299.
523 For a rejection of Westermann in favor of a metaphorical interpretation, see Seitz, Isaiah, 335.
524 Baltzer, Deutero-Isaiah, 53-4.
What does this imply for the Synoptics who cite this particular section to inform the reader about the movement begun by John the Baptist and taken to its fulfillment by Jesus? As Watts writes, citing Isaiah 40 at the commencement of the Gospels “indicates that the primary horizon is Israel’s narrative and in particular Isaiah’s prophetic hopes of restoration….” Morna Hooker agrees, commenting that when the Gospel of Mark opens with this citation from Isaiah, “the key to understanding what this ‘Gospel’—or ‘Good News’—might be is to be found in the book of Isaiah.” In other words, Mark situates the story of Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection within the expected restoration of Second Isaiah in order to show that such hopes were coming to pass in and through the events recorded in the Gospels. The return from exile and the time of restoration was finding its fulfillment in and through the ministry of Jesus. As a result, the Gospels are drawing upon the prophetic expectations in order to inform their readers about the importance of Jesus’ ministry.

Within the Gospel of Luke, the citation of Isaiah 40:3-5 seems to be limited to the role of explaining John the Baptist’s role in the eschatological restoration. Nevertheless, Luke, like Mark, draws upon Isaiah’s prophecies in order to contextualize Jesus’ proclamation of the “good news” or “gospel.” In the inaugural event of his earthly ministry at a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus reads Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2 saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s

favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Again, one finds Jesus proclaiming the “gospel” or “good news” integrally connected to Isaiah’s future expectations. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, Isaiah 61 was interpreted messianically, anticipating a future time when God would bring healing for his people. Thus, the readers of Luke, at least those well-versed in the eschatological expectations of Second Temple Judaism, would have likely seen this appropriation of Isaiah 61 as Jesus’ assumption of the role of messianic deliverer. When he finishes reading from this section of Isaiah Jesus authoritatively asserts, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). By citing these texts from Isaiah as indicative of himself, Jesus affirms that “the eschatological program of Isaiah” is being fulfilled in and through his ministry. In other words, the “year of the Lord’s favor” that Second Isaiah anticipated is being fulfilled by Jesus’ role in salvation history.

Not only does Isaiah 61:1-2 designate Jesus as the one able to impart the divine Spirit in Luke-Acts, but it also verifies Jesus’ messianic identity in the narrative of Luke. When John the Baptist sends people inquiring, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (Luke 7:20). Jesus responds, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” (Luke 7:22). While Isaiah 61:1-2 has been

---

527 Jesus’ endowment with the Spirit is important for Luke, being mentioned previously to this particular verse. After Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus is described as “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1), and it is under the “power of the Spirit,” Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee (Luke 4:14).

528 Though fragmented, 4Q521 clearly connects the Messiah with Isaiah 61: “… [the heavens and the earth will listen to His Messiah, and none therein will stray from the commandments of the holy ones…. Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power…. He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the bent (Ps. cxlvi, 7-8)…. For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor (Isa. Lxi, 1)” (4Q521, fr. II, trans. Vermes). There are some intriguing parallels here between the Beatitudes of Matt. 5 and this text’s expectation of God’s spirit being given to the poor. Cf. 11Q13 and its use of Isa. 61 in the expected deliverance by Melchizedek.


amalgamated with several other Isaianic texts in this instance,\footnote{The phrase, “the blind receive their sight” has parallels in Isa. 29:18, Isa. 35:5, and 61:1. The phrase, “the lame walk,” echoes Isa. 35:6. The “deaf hear” parallels Isa. 29:18 and Isa. 35:5. The “dead are raised” alludes to Isa. 26:19. The final part of the phrase, “the poor have good news brought to them” comes from Isa. 61:1. Regardless of their various locations across Isaiah, they all speak of the eschatological renewal. By citing them together, the text is affirming “that the hoped-for events of the Isaianic expectations are being fulfilled in Jesus’ present ministry” as cited from Christopher Tuckett, “Isaiah in Q,” in Isaiah in the New Testament, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 54. The only phrase that does not have Isaianic precedence is the phrase “the dead are raised.” Interestingly, in 4Q521, the imagery of Isaiah is also assimilated to the affirmation that the Messiah will raise the dead. The usage of these phrases to define the messianic role was present outside of Luke’s Gospel and therefore current in certain sectors of Judaism. See James VanderKam and Peter Flint, The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 332-4.} Jesus again relies upon the passage in order to substantiate his messianic identity. Thus, Jesus is identified in different places as the spirit-endowed deliverer of Isaiah 61 who ushers in God’s eschatological restoration.

The prominent way in which the Synoptics incorporate significant passages from Isaiah to define the significance of John the Baptist and Jesus’ ministries reveals that Isaiah’s eschatological hopes have become essential for understanding the narratives of the Gospels themselves. Mark’s arresting introduction to the Gospel with his citation of Isaiah 40:3 and Luke’s presentation of Jesus as the Spirit-endowed deliverer of Isaiah 61 reveal their assumption that Jesus’ ministry should be understood in light of the restoration expected in the latter portion of Isaiah.\footnote{After seeing the manifold ways Jesus uses Isaianic texts, Evans writes, “We have here every indication that Jesus understood his call and ministry in terms of the message of (Second) Isaiah” (idem, “Isaiah in the New Testament,” 671; cf. 674).} By applying these key texts from Isaiah to Jesus, the Gospel writers are signaling to their readers that Israel’s restoration from her exilic plight were coming true, just as the second portion of Isaiah had prophesied.

4.D. The Baptism

The Synoptics introduce the ministry of Jesus with his predecessor, John the Baptist, who calls the Jewish people to repentance, baptizing those who repent in the Jordan River. In Mark’s
Gospel, John the Baptist identifies himself as the harbinger of a more powerful baptizer: “I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8). Matthew and Luke both record John uttering similar affirmations that the coming one would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). By contrasting John the Baptist and Jesus in this way, the Gospels identify a qualitative difference between John the Baptist and Jesus. Though John possesses the significant role of preparing “the way,” Jesus is the one who brings the eschatological promise of the Spirit. This is most fully developed in Luke-Acts during the feast of Pentecost when the Spirit of God falls palpably upon the followers of Jesus (Acts 2:1-21).

Nevertheless, the affirmation that Jesus baptizes with the Spirit reveals that the anticipated impartation of the divine spirit has arrived with Jesus.

Contrary to what one might expect, John the Baptist is the one who baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River, rather than vice versa. During the baptism of Jesus, Mark records the following events: “And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart (σχιζομένους) and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’” (Mark 1:10-11).534 The divine voice at the baptism—which Luke and Matthew adopt with little substantial change535—contains allusions to several key texts, confirming Jesus’ eschatological roles as Israel’s king and YHWH’s servant.536 The first Scriptural allusion in the divine pronouncement comes from

---

534 It is also possible that the tearing of the heavens echoes Isaiah 64:1: “O that you would tear open (ἀνοίξῃς) the heavens and come down...” Hooker, “Mark’s Gospel,” 45. If so, this would provide another connection between Mark and Isaiah, though the differences in the Greek texts do not make the issue conclusive.

535 The divine voice differs only moderately in Matthew with a switch from the second to the third person. Matthew 3:17 is in the third person: “Οὗτός εστιν ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἁγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.” Luke 3:22 follows Mark by putting the voice in the second person: “Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἁγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.”

536 Despite the warning from Hatina that we should not become myopic in our exegesis of embedded Scriptural allusions, I find the connection that some make between (ἀγαπητός) and the beloved son of passages like Gen. 22:2, 12, and 16, to be strained, though not impossible. The reason for my reluctance here is the presence of (ἀγαπητός) in Matt. 12:18’s quotation of Isa. 42:1, which could possibly attest to a textual tradition which we no
Psalm 2:7 LXX: “You are my son (υἱός μου εἶ σύ).”\(^{537}\) Psalm 2 was an enthronement Psalm that celebrated the coronation of a Davidic king. In fact, the Psalm itself contains other Scriptural allusions, namely, that of 2 Samuel 7:14 where God covenants with David, pledging that he will be “a father” and David’s progeny would be God’s “son.” The allusion to Psalm 2:7 plants Jesus firmly within the eschatological hopes of Israel, specifically their hope for a Davidic king that would lead his people in righteousness.\(^{538}\)

The second part of the pronouncement at the baptism, “with you I am well pleased (ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα),” mirrors the description of YHWH’s servant in Isa. 42:1a: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.”\(^{539}\) In the quotation in Mark 1:11, the text resembles the MT rather than the LXX.\(^{540}\) While some have been reluctant to embrace an allusion to Isaiah 42:1 based on the dissimilarity between the LXX and Mark 1:11,\(^{541}\) the allusion longer have. If so, there would be no need to posit another text behind the allusions here. See Thomas R. Hatina, “Embedded Scripture Texts and the Plurality of Meaning: The Announcement of the ‘Voice from Heaven’ in Mark 1.11 as a Case Study,” in The Gospel of Mark, vol. 1 of Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels, ed. Thomas R. Hatina (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 81-99.

\(^{537}\) Against those who would discredit the allusion to Psalm 2:7 and attribute most of the wording here to Isaiah, see I. Howard Marshall, “A Son of God or Servant of Yahweh?—A Reconsideration of Mark I.11,” NTS 15, no. 3 (1969): 326-36.

\(^{538}\) Some scholars are much too cautious here and refuse to see this as an affirmation of Jesus’ messianic role based upon the fact that “son of God” was not a messianic title in Judaism before the emergence of Christianity. The discovery of 4Q246 has complicated the issue a little more. The fragmentary nature of the document, instead of answering questions about whether the “son of God” circulated before the Christian era, has spawned more debate whether the “son of God” figure is a protagonist or an antagonist, though the view that the “son of God” figure is a positive figure is more persuasive. See Collins, Scepter and the Star, 171-88. Regardless of one’s take on 4Q246, the language of anointing by the Spirit coupled with the view that the Davidic kings were God’s metaphorical “sons” suggests that we can be safe in assuming the allusion to Psalm 2:7 would be regarded as Messianic, which is the case in other Qumran scrolls like 4Q174. Thus, I take a different position than the following: Fitzmyer, Gospel according to Luke, 1:479-85; Hooker, Servant, 68-9.

\(^{539}\) Watts, Isaiah’s New Exodus, 114-5; Guelich, Mark 1-8:26, 34.

\(^{540}\) While the allusion in the baptismal formula departs from the LXX, Matthew has not assimilated the allusion to Isa. 42:1 in Matt. 3:17 to his citation of the same verse in Matt. 12:18. The most likely explanation is that Matthew is trying to maintain affinity with Mark in Matt. 3:17 more than Isa. 42:1. So Ulrich Luz, Matthew 1-7: A Commentary, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 180.

\(^{541}\) Hooker, for example, originally thought an allusion to Isa. 42:1 was probable but suggests this was not to put Jesus in the role of the servant (at least as an individual), but simply to associate him with the eschatology of Second Isaiah (Hooker, Servant, 68-73, 148-50). More recently, she has been more forceful and repudiated any connection with Isaiah 42:1, saying “there is little to indicate that Mark had Isa. 42:1 in mind” (Hooker, “Mark’s Gospel,” 46). In my opinion, her over-arching thesis that the Synoptics do not see Jesus linked with some kind of messianic connotation of the Servant unnecessarily forces her to dismiss likely connections to the servant here. The
cannot be so easily dismissed. In Isaiah 42:1, YHWH not only delights in his servant, but he also puts his Spirit upon him,\textsuperscript{542} which is precisely what occurs in the baptismal scene. Thus, even if the linguistic connections are not exact, there is certainly enough conceptual contact between the two passages to conclude that an allusion to Deutero-Isaiah’s servant is present.

The pericope of the baptism once again paints Jesus on the eschatological canvas of Second Temple Judaism, weaving several of the hopes for restoration into one dense episode. Jesus’ relationship with God mirrors that of the Davidic king, endowing him with the mantle of the eschatological ruler. In addition, Jesus assumes the role of YHWH’s servant, further demonstrating the influence of Second Isaiah’s restoration theology upon the Gospels and Jesus’ ministry.\textsuperscript{543} Finally, the Spirit descends upon Jesus at the baptism, giving him the ability to baptize others in the Spirit, the means by which God would transform his faithless covenant partners into obedient participants. Thus, the baptism of Jesus combines several strands of restoration theology and connects them with the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

4.E. Jesus as YHWH’s Servant

The Synoptics also place Jesus within the eschatological expectations of Isaiah’s prophecies by depicting him as YHWH’s servant.\textsuperscript{544} In the book of Isaiah, Old Testament scholars have traditionally identified four distinct poems or songs about YHWH’s servant

---

\textsuperscript{542} Isaiah 42:1, “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”

\textsuperscript{543} Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 1:342-3.

\textsuperscript{544} There has been scholarly debate on this issue, which would be remiss not to mention. For instance, see some of the essays in \textit{Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins}, ed. William H. Bellinger, Jr. and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1998).
embedded in the second portion of Isaiah: Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12. Though ancient readers probably would not have read them as a distinct group, the texts are relevant to the Gospels since the Gospels use the servant songs on several occasions in order to explain Jesus’ mission and identity. We have already had the occasion to observe the allusion to YHWH’s servant at the baptism of Christ, but there are several others.

One of the most extensive citations from the first servant song (Isa. 42:1-4) is to be found in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew 12 opens with Jesus and the Pharisees debating the legality of plucking grain on the Sabbath. The next pericope has Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath, further infuriating the Pharisees (Matt. 12:9-14). With conflict seeming imminent, Jesus withdraws from the scene and continues to heal people, forbidding them “not to make him known” (Matt. 12:16). These events, especially the withdrawal from the imminent conflict, are taken to be a direct fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1-4 and Matthew quotes the passage extensively (Matt. 12:18-21). By doing so, Matthew identifies Jesus as YHWH’s spirit-endowed servant “who will proclaim justice to the Gentiles” (Matt. 12:18). While it is not entirely apparent how Matthew thinks Jesus takes upon himself the characteristics of Isaiah’s servant, the context suggests a few things. First, Jesus has just withdrawn from a situation that could potentially escalate into conflict. Thus, the servant’s gentle and humble approach—“He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets” (Matt. 12:19)—has been adopted in Jesus’ choice to de-escalate a conflict. Second, the quotation from Isaiah twice mentions the servant’s relationship to the Gentiles, for the servant “will proclaim justice to the Gentiles” and “in his name the Gentiles will hope” (Matt. 12:18 and 21). One could suggest that the preceding

---

545 Distinguishing four servant songs in the latter half of Isaiah has its origins in an old, but distinguished work on Isaiah. See Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).
discussions about Sabbath observance might be insinuating that Sabbath observance should not be as fastidious for the Gentiles as some of the Jewish sects made it. Even if there is not a subtle allusion to lessening the Sabbath requirements for specifically Gentile followers, the full quotation of Isaiah 42:1-4 indicates the mission of Jesus has a universal thrust and is not limited to the confines of the Jewish people.548

There are also allusions in the Gospels that use the final servant song (Isa. 52:13:-53:12) in order to explicate the person and mission of Jesus. In Matthew 8, the author lists a series of miracles wherein Jesus heals a leper, the centurion’s servant, and many others at Peter’s house. At the end of this series, Matthew writes, “This was to fulfill what had been spoke through the prophet Isaiah, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases’” (Matt. 8:17). Here he cites a small segment from the final servant song, Isaiah 53:4, in order to show Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies. The quotation of the verse indicates that Jesus fulfills his eschatological role through healing the infirmities and diseases of others.549 Interestingly, Matthew and Mark never use the final servant song to explain the death of Jesus. If they do it only seems to be in the possible—and very subtle—allusions in the ransom and Last Supper sayings.550

Luke, however, does use the final servant song to explain that Jesus’ ignominious demise was part of God’s plan. In Luke 22, shortly before the events that precipitate his death, Jesus says “… this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted among the lawless’; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled”’ (Luke 22:37). The Scriptural allusion comes


550 It is possible that Jesus’ ransom sayings which describe him serving others and being a ransom “for many” (Matt. 20:28//Mk 10:45) has points of contact with the final servant song. See Rikki E. Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: a Crux Revisited,” in Jesus and the Suffering Servant, 125-51.
from Isaiah 53:12, which indicates that Jesus death in Jerusalem between two thieves mirrors the suffering servant.\textsuperscript{551} Whether this allusion to the servant means that Jesus’ death functions vicariously like the servant’s death is contingent upon how much the author presumed his audience knew of the servant song. Some conclude that the allusion would infer the larger context and thus describe Jesus’ death as a vicarious atonement, like the servant’s.\textsuperscript{552} Others are a bit reticent to go this far and simply think Luke sees the servant’s death as prophetic of the ignominious demise Jesus faces at the cross. In fact, the fullest allusion to the final servant song happens in the account of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40, which suggests that Luke was well aware of the parallels between the final servant song and Jesus.\textsuperscript{553}

However, Hooker notes that even with the fuller citation in Acts, the author of Luke-Acts never quotes the portions of the final servant song that indicate his death was a vicarious atonement.\textsuperscript{554} Instead, the emphasis is always on the kind of death and humiliation that both figures encounter. In light of this, one cannot fully conclude that the author of Luke-Acts definitely utilized Isaiah 53 to indicate that, like the servant, Jesus’ death was a vicarious atonement for others, though it is not beyond the realm of possibility so long as the author presumed such knowledge on the part of his readers.\textsuperscript{555} What can be said, though, is that Luke


\textsuperscript{553} Perhaps Luke’s failure to provide proof texts that predict the Messiah’s death when he alludes to such passages in the Old Testament (Luke 24:46; Acts 13:29) is because he includes the key texts later in his two volume set, as he does here in Acts 8.

\textsuperscript{554} Hooker, \textit{Servant}, 114; idem, “Did the Use of Isaiah 3 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?” in \textit{Jesus and the Suffering Servant}, 91-2.

\textsuperscript{555} The most persuasive argument for seeing an overt connection between Isaiah’s suffering servant and Jesus is found in the way the Gospels use “baptism” as a euphemism for Christ’s death (e.g. Mark 10:38-9; Luke 12:50). As will be shown in the following section, the baptismal scene also identifies Jesus as the Isaianic servant. If the baptism is the point at which Jesus takes on the role of the Isaianic servant, it is at least suggestive that the use of “baptism” to refer to his imminent death implies that the Gospel writers saw Jesus as assuming the role of Isaiah’s
The use of servant imagery to describe Jesus reiterates a former conclusion. In short, the eschatological hopes contained within Isaiah inform the Gospel writers’ understanding of Jesus. Just as the servant possessed a role in YHWH’s eschatological program, even so the Gospel writers indicate at important junctures that Jesus is bringing these expectations to fulfillment. He has therefore donned the mantle of YHWH’s servant.

4.F. Preaching of the Kingdom of God

Thus far, it seems clear that the Gospel writers situate Jesus’ activity within the larger hopes and expectations for Israel’s renewal. Does the same thing hold true for Jesus main message, the arrival of the kingdom of God? New Testament scholarship has been unified around the assertion that the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus’ ministry. Unfortunately, there has been little agreement on what Jesus meant when he proclaimed the arrival of God’s kingdom.556 Despite, the contentions of some who have sought to strip Jesus’ notion of the kingdom of its eschatological and apocalyptic garb,557 the argument that Jesus’ view of the kingdom would have been colored with the eschatological elements of his day and

---

556 There has been constant debate over whether the kingdom is a future, supra-temporal reality (e.g. Schweitzer) or whether it is an imminent experience of God that is entirely present in Jesus’ ministry (e.g. Dodd). For their respective views, see Albert Schweitzer, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus’ Messiahship and Passion, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Macmillan, 1960) and C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (Digswell Place, Welwyn: James Nisbet and Company, 1935; reprint 1958).

age still seems persuasive.558 Even those who dismiss apocalyptic thought in Jesus are forced to acknowledge the widespread apocalyptic dimension of late Second Temple Judaism,559 which most likely influenced Jesus as well.

In attempting to describe the nature of the “kingdom of God,” Norman Perrin helpfully reminds scholars that the kingdom of God functions as a symbol. As a symbol, it captures Israel’s past history in which God had demonstrated himself as king. As Perrin observes, the worldview underlying the Old Testament understood “the world as being under the direct control of the God who had acted as a king on their behalf and would continue to do so.”560 Thus, on the one hand, the symbol of the kingdom was rooted and grounded in the antecedent history of the Jewish people. On the other hand, it was poised for the future, anticipating God’s work on behalf of Israel. As a result, the symbol of God’s kingdom encapsulated the meta-narrative of the Jewish people, reminding them of their past and informing their expectations of the future.561

558 Moreover, the argument for continuity, which can trace the intellectual lineage from John the Baptist through Jesus to Paul would support the belief that Jesus too embraced the general contours of Jewish eschatology. See Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, 91-5.

559 Even Crossan concedes the overwhelming influence of apocalyptic thought in the kingdom of God language during the turning of the eras. In order to separate Jesus from the apocalyptic types, he has to distinguish a “sapiential kingdom” from the apocalyptic one. See Crossan, Historical Jesus, 284-91. Such a clean-cut separation seems unlikely. It seems more possible that a pluripotent symbol like the kingdom of God could connote both the notion that God would return in judgment and that he was the moral lawgiver of the world. Moreover, comparing Jesus’ beatitudes with those in 4Q525 reveal that Jesus’ beatitudes are eschatological while those in 4Q525 are sapiential, revealing that Jesus did exhibit an eschatological outlook instead of a purely sapiential one. See VanderKam and Flint, Dead Sea Scrolls, 336-8.

560 Perrin, Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 23. Perrin is well known for his demarcation between a steno-symbol and a tensive symbol. A steno-symbol has only one referent in a given context, whereas a tensive symbol can never be equated with any individual referent. Thus, a tensive symbol can never be fully “exhausted” by the things signified (Ibid., 30). According to him, Jesus uses the kingdom “as a tensive symbol” (Ibid., 56).

561 Perrin, Language of the Kingdom, 33. While categorizing the “kingdom of God” as a symbol is helpful, Perrin goes too far when he says that Kingdom is “not an idea or a conception.” While Perrin’s view is helpful in showing why the phrase has such ambiguity on the lips of Jesus, it is pushing it too far to suggest that understanding the kingdom of God as a symbol voids it of concepts or ideas. Here Sanders’ incisive rejoinder is helpful. Just because the kingdom is a symbol capable of various interpretations, this does not mean it has no concepts associated with it or that we cannot identify a core range of its meaning within the Gospels. See Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, 125-7.
The Old Testament possesses manifold texts that point to the belief that God is the king over Israel specifically and, more globally, the world.\textsuperscript{562} In the book of Numbers, Balaam states: “The Lord their God is with them, acclaimed as a king among them” (Num. 23:21). The belief that God was the true king of Israel made Israel’s request for a human king problematic. In 1 Samuel 8:7, the request for a human king essentially deposes God as king in favor of a human king.\textsuperscript{563} Of course, being king over Zion did not preclude God from being king over the world either. In fact, because YHWH had connected himself with a particular people, this allowed him to establish his hegemony over the world. Psalm 47:8 manifests God’s authority over global geopolitics: “God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.” When the prophetic texts announce God’s restoration of his people, they appeal to the belief that God is king over the nations in order to ground their eschatological hopes. In Jeremiah 44, the oracle affirms YHWH’s kingship over Egypt: “As I live, says the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts, one is coming like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea. Pack your bags for exile, sheltered daughter Egypt! For Memphis shall become a waste, a ruin, without inhabitant” (Jer. 44:18-19). Though Egypt will experience exile, God’s primacy means he can bring his own people back from exile:

But as for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for I am going to save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and no one shall make him afraid. As for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob, says the Lord, for I am with you (Jer. 44:27-8).

God’s rule over the world means he can mete out justice on the persecuting nations and redeem his people from exile. Like Jeremiah, Second Isaiah also correlates God’s kingdom with his

\textsuperscript{562} 1 Chron. 16:31; 28:5; 2 Chron. 13:8; Pss. 10:16; 22:28; 24:8-10; 47:2; 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1-4; 145:11-13; 103:19; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 8:19; 10:10; 48:15; 51:57; Mal. 1:14.
\textsuperscript{563} 1 Samuel 8:7 “And the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.’” Cf. 1 Sam. 12:12-9.
ability and choice to save and redeem his people. For example, Isaiah 52:7 reads, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Isa. 52:7). Likewise, Isaiah 44:6 reads, “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.” When the prophets speak of God being king, they are not simply making the metaphysical claim that God controls the world. Rather, the claim that God is king goes hand in hand with the expectation that God will act to save and redeem his people.

Among the Old Testament books that would have influenced a first century Jew’s understanding of the kingdom of God, few would surpass Daniel. In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar has a vexing vision about a statue composed of different metals. Its head was made of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the torso and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron, and its feet had a mixture of iron and clay (Dan. 2:32-3). In the dream, a stone uncut by human hands demolishes the statue, and this stone turns into a mountain (Dan. 2:35). Fortunately, the narrator interprets the vision for the reader and notes each of the respective metals stands for a respective kingdom or empire. Most relevant to the discussion here concerns the stone that pulverizes the statue, which is interpreted as the following: “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”

---

564 Such connections are linked with earlier motifs in the book: Isa. 33:22 says “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us.” The expectation of God’s salvation of his people is tied to his kingship.

565 Other passages are relevant here too from the prophets: Zephaniah 3:15, “The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.” This does not always mean that God would deal favorably with Israel. Other passages indicate that God’s kingship meant he would also act to punish Israel when deserving of it. For example, Ezekiel 20:33 says, “As I live, says the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you.”
Thus, the arrival of the kingdom of God terminates the rule of the empires that have plagued God’s people. In other words, they would be liberated from the bondage they endured when the kingdom of God arrived.

Daniel 7 reiterates the same succession of kingdoms that we see in Daniel 2. This time, however, the kingdoms are portrayed as grotesque beasts—a winged lion, a bear, a four-headed leopard, and one extremely terrifying beast with manifold horns. In the place of the stone, a different figure brings judgment on the kingdoms. The narrator describes the climax of the vision, the end of the persecuting empires, in the following manner:

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being (υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου LXX) coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

In the vision, the Son of Man figure is equated with “the people of the holy ones of the Most High” (Dan. 7:27). If read at face value, the vision suggests that when God—here the Ancient of Days—establishes his kingdom, he will judge the foreign empires and liberate his people. The people in view would be Israel as a corporate entity. However, it is not difficult to see how a messianic reading of the Son of Man figure could emerge. Daniel 9 speaks of the arrival of a “prince” and “an anointed one” being cut off (Dan. 9:26). If the Son of Man figure were equated

---

566 It is quite peculiar that Josephus intentionally avoids discussing the nature of this stone that crushes the kingdoms of this world. In fact, he omits the interpretation of the stone intentionally, likely because of its political ramifications: “Daniel did also declare the meaning of the stone to the king; but I do not think proper to relate it, since I have only undertaken to describe things past or things present, but not things that are future: yet if anyone be so very desirous of knowing truth, as not to waive such points of curiosity, and cannot curb his inclination for understanding the uncertainties of futurity, and whether they will happen or not, let him be diligent in reading the book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings” (Josephus, Ant. 10.10.4, trans. Whiston). If Josephus can be taken as a paradigm for how Daniel was read in the first century, it seems that the common Jewish person would have seen the Roman empire as the final kingdom in the succession since Josephus says he is only talking about realities that were currently present or in the past. The only thing that lay in the future, from Josephus’ point of view, was the arrival of God’s kingdom, which would sound the death knell for the Romans. Even though he was able to sound loyal to Roman occupation by citing Daniel’s prophecy too (Josephus, Ant. 10.11.7), he was just selective in the parts he chose to include.
with the “anointed one” of Daniel 9, then the hopes for God’s redemption could be located on a particular individual, a Messiah. Whether Daniel 9 influenced the interpretation of the Son of Man figure or not, there are several ancient texts that do see the Son of Man figure as synonymous with a messianic ruler. Regardless of how Daniel was interpreted or meant to be interpreted, there is an underlying expectation for the future and its relation to the kingdom of God. From the seer’s point of view, the pagan human empires were presently being allowed to run their course. However, in due time, God would act in judgment upon them. When he did so, he would free his people from their oppression. Thus, the arrival of God’s kingdom would emancipate his people from their enemies, which was essential for their complete restoration.

The non-canonical literature of the Second Temple era continues to connect the kingdom of God with the restoration of God’s people. For instance, the third book of the *Sibylline Oracles* indicates that the Jerusalem temple will fulfill its eschatological function after the kingdom of God arrives:

> And then indeed he will raise up his kingdom for all ages among men, he who once gave the holy Law to pious men, to all of whom he promised to open the earth and the world and the gates of the blessed and all joys and immortal intellect and eternal cheer. From every land they shall bring incense and gifts to the house of the great God. There will be no other house among men, even for future generations to honor except the one which God gave to faithful men to honor (for mortals will invoke the son of the great God) (*Sib. Or.* 3:767-74; OTP 1:379).

Here the inclusion of the Gentiles in the worship of God has come to pass, and God’s rule extends over the nations from the temple itself. The *Assumption of Moses* likewise anticipates God’s future kingdom and with it, God’s judgment of evil nations:

---

567 For example, in *4 Ezra*’s apocalyptic vision, the fourth kingdom—the one equated with Daniel’s fourth kingdom (*4 Ezra* 12.11)—terminates with the roaring of the lion that symbolizes the Messiah (*4 Ezra* 12.31-2). *1 Enoch* 46.1-4 also interprets the Son of Man as a singular individual, most likely the Messiah, even though the text never explicitly states such. For a fuller development, see Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 313-20 and Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1973), 170-2.

568 The editors regard the portion in parentheses as a Christian interpolation.
Then His kingdom will appear throughout his whole creation. Then the devil will have an end. Yea, sorrow will be led away with him.... For God Most High will surge forth, the Eternal One alone. In full view will he come to work vengeance on the nations. Yea, all their idols will he destroy. Then will you be happy, O Israel! And you will mount up above the necks and the wings of an eagle. Yea, all things will be fulfilled. And God will raise you to the heights. Yea, he will fix you firmly in the heaven of the stars, in the place of their habitations (As. Mos. 10.1, 7-9; OTP 1:931-2).\footnote{Similarly, The Testament of Dan makes God’s reign over Israel coterminous with Israel’s restoration:}

And Jerusalem shall no longer undergo desolation, nor shall Israel be led into captivity, because the Lord will be in her midst [living among human beings]. The Holy One of Israel will rule over them in humility and poverty, and he who trusts in him shall reign in truth in the heavens (T. Dan, 5:13; OTP 1:810).

Again we can see a number of themes being combined. The restoration of Israel often appears alongside of the assertion that Israel’s God is king. This suggests that the symbol of God’s kingdom is not simply an assertion regarding a metaphysical state of affairs, but signifies God’s ability to redeem his people and usher in the promised age of restoration.\footnote{When Jesus proclaimed the arrival of God’s kingdom in first century Palestine, his listeners would likely have heard his message as heralding the anticipated age of restoration. N.T. Wright summarizes the point well: “If, then, someone were to speak to Jesus’ contemporaries of YHWH’s becoming king, we may safely assume that they would have in mind, in some form or other, this two-sided story concerning the double reality of exile. Israel}

\footnote{Ibid., 264. As Meier concludes, “…the symbol of God ruling as king was alive and well in the ‘intertestamental’ period and was often connected with eschatological hopes (sometimes with apocalyptic elements) concerning the restoration of all Israel gathered around Mt. Zion or Jerusalem.”}

\footnote{Regarding the date: “…the position that the work has its roots in the early 2d century B.C. but reached final form in the early 1st century A.D. appears the most likely. Actually, any theory that admits that the work as a whole would have been known in Palestine in the first part of the 1st century A.D. qualifies it for our consideration…” John P. Meier, Mentor, Message, and Miracles, vol. 2 of A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 255.}
would ‘really’ return from exile; YHWH would finally return to Zion.”

Because the kingdom was widely associated with the restoration of Israel, one can expect that Jesus also operated with a similar understanding. John P. Meier, who arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the understanding of God’s kingdom, chides his critics: “If, as some critics have claimed, Jesus did not want his use of the symbol to embody eschatological hopes for the future, it would have been absolutely necessary for him—unless he did not care about being misunderstood—to make clear that he did not intend an eschatological dimension when he employed the symbol.” However, as Meier demonstrates, there are enough similarities between Jesus’ descriptions of the kingdom and the dominant Jewish pattern that indicate Jesus equated the arrival of the kingdom with God’s redemption of his people as understood within restoration theology. In light of these cultural connections between the kingdom of God and Israel’s restoration, we can assume that even Jesus’ central message of the kingdom invoked Israel’s ongoing chronicle of God’s people awaiting restoration.

If the Gospels and the message of Jesus are analyzed closely, the connection between the kingdom of God and Israel’s restoration appears firmly established. Matthew’s Gospel makes the association with restoration clear in the geographical setting where Jesus begins his ministry. When Jesus originally initiates his announcement of the kingdom in Matthew (Matt. 4:17), we are told that Jesus

---


572 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 224. “The question is not, did ‘kingdom of god,’ for Jesus, still mean ‘Israel’s god, the creator, at last asserting his sovereign rule over his world,’ with the connotation of the return from exile, the return of YHWH to Zion, the vindication of Israel by this covenant god, and the defeat of her enemies? That simply was its basic, irreducible meaning within first-century Palestine. The question is, *in what sense* did Jesus affirm this meaning, and how did he redefine the concept in such a way as to give rise to the meanings that emerge among his earliest followers?”

573 Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, 269. After surveying several relevant kingdom sayings from Jesus, he does conclude that “Jesus did understand the central symbol of the kingdom of God in terms of the definitive coming of God in the near future to bring the present state of things to an end and to establish his full and unimpeded rule over the world in general and Israel in particular” (Ibid., 349).
... left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned” (Matt. 4:13b-16).

By recording a change in Jesus’ geographical setting, Matthew seeks to make a theological point, which he does by citing Isaiah 9:1-2. The mention of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali seem intentional in order to allude to the tribes that had suffered exile, and the Isaiah Targum interprets Isaiah 9:1-2 as a reference to their exile under the Assyrians. It seems quite likely that Matthew finds the geographical location significant because these are precisely the tribes waiting for their restoration. Thus, when Jesus begins his proclamation of the kingdom, which signified that God’s restoration of his people was underway, he did so precisely in those regions that were waiting for it. Moreover, the various hopes that believed Israel’s restoration would affect the Gentiles also come into play in the passage. By citing Isaiah 9:1-2, Matthew also draws attention to this region’s moniker, “Galilee of the Gentiles,” in order to show that the Gentiles are beneficiaries of the kingdom along with the beleaguered nation of Israel.

Therefore, when Jesus does begin his proclamation of the kingdom, it stands within the stream of the Jewish storyline that anticipated God’s redemption of their people, which—according to some expectations—would flow past Palestine’s borders to engulf the Gentiles as well.

---

574 “For none shall be weary who shall come to oppress them, as at the former time, when the people of the land of Zebulun, and the people of the land of Naphtali went into captivity: and those that were left, a mighty king led into captivity, because they did not remember the power of the Red Sea, neither the wonders of the Jordan, the war of the fortifications of the nations” (Tg. Isa. 9:1-2) in C.W.H. Pauli, trans., The Chaldee Paraphrase on the Prophet Isaiah (London: London Society’s House, 1871). Although modern scholars tend to interpret Isaiah 9 as an accession poem for a king, the Isaiah Targum reads the following portions of Isaiah 9 messianically: “The prophet said to the house of David, For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and he has taken the law upon Himself to keep it. His name is called from eternity, Wonderful, The Mighty God, who liveth to eternity, the Messiah, whose peace shall be great upon us in His days” (Tg. Isa. 9.6, trans. Pauli).


576 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:383-5.
When we evaluate Jesus’ notion of the kingdom as presented in the Gospels more closely, not only is it recognizable that there are Old Testament antecedents for this symbol of the Jewish worldview, but we particularly find demonstrable similarities with the Old Testament book of Daniel. This is not to suggest that Jesus fails to add his own creative twists and nuances to the Jewish expectation but that he uses the eschatological terminology of Daniel as a vehicle to convey his own proclamation of the coming kingdom. In order to make the point regarding Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom, I will identify several of the more persuasive similarities that scholars have identified.

The first of these is the fact that both Jesus and Daniel speak of a specific “time” being completed before the arrival of the kingdom, which Craig Evans terms a shared “language of imminence.” In Daniel 7:22, which interprets the Ancient One’s judgment upon the beasts in Daniel’s vision, the text says: “Until the Ancient One came; then judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom.” The Greek translations of this text bear remarkable resemblance to later statements of the Gospels and are listed here:

Daniel 7:22 LXX θ… ὁ καιρὸς ἔφθασε καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν κατέσχον οἱ ἅγιοι.”

Daniel 7.22 LXX “… ὁ καιρὸς ἔφθασε, καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν κατέσχον οἱ ἅγιοι.”

At the end of the book, Daniel is instructed, “But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time (καιροῦ) of the end...” (Daniel 12:4 LXX). In both Daniel 7:22 and 12:4, there is a certain “time,” that must elapse before the kingdom of God arrives. Interestingly, this is precisely the terminology Jesus uses in his announcement of the kingdom. In Mark 1:15,
Jesus says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” The Greek translation here mirrors the language of Daniel as noted in the underlined portions of the Greek text: “πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἡ γεγονέν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.” (Mark 1:15). Matthew’s version drops the reference to the time being completed, but still retains the imminence of the kingdom’s arrival when Jesus utters the call: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near (Μετανοεῖτε· ἡ γεγονέν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν)” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17).

There is also the Q saying that speaks to the nearness of the kingdom as a result of Jesus’ exorcisms as well. Jesus makes the assertion that if his exorcisms come from God’s Spirit, “the kingdom of God has come to you” (Matt. 12:28b; Luke 11:20b). The Greek here again echoes the imminent language found in the Greek text of Daniel as well: “ἐλθεν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.” Thus, the anticipated arrival of the kingdom, the expiration of the “time” that Daniel anticipated reveals the influence of Danielic eschatology upon Jesus.

Second, Daniel 2, which reveals the sequence of human kingdoms ultimately fading before the kingdom of God in the vision of the metal statue, repeatedly describes the kingdom as a “mystery,” which is also how the Gospels describe the kingdom. Again, the similarities here do not seem coincidental since they appear in conjunction with a great deal of other similarities, which substantiates the literary connection.

Daniel 2:19: “Then the mystery (τὸ μυστήριον) was revealed to Daniel…”

Daniel 2:27: “Daniel answered the king, ‘No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show to the king the mystery (τὸ μυστήριον) that the king is asking.”

Daniel 2:30a: “But as for me, this mystery (τὸ μυστήριον) has not been revealed to me because of any wisdom that I have more than any other living being....”

---


580 For these passages from Daniel, the Greek comes from the LXX.
Daniel 2:47: “The king said to Daniel, ‘Truly, your god is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο)!”

Mark 4:11a: “And he said to them, ‘To you has been given the secret (τὸ μυστήριον) of the kingdom of God (τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ)…’

Matt. 13:11a: “He answered, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν)….’

Luke 8:10a: “He said, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God (τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ)….’

Both Daniel and the Gospels describe the kingdom as a μυστήριον that unaided human wisdom cannot penetrate. Only God’s disclosure manifests the realities of the kingdom.

Third, another peculiar linguistic similarity can be found in Daniel 2 when the stone uncut by human hands crushes the statue of variegated metals. In the interpretation, the seer says:

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces (λικμήσει) all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold” (Dan. 2:44-5a).

At the end of the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, Jesus gives a warning about the rejected cornerstone, and uses the same words to depict the effects of stumbling over the cornerstone as Daniel used of the stone pulverizing the statue. In Luke, Jesus says: “What then is this that is written: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?’ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him (λικμήσει)” (Luke 20:17-8). Again, the connection between the texts occurs not just in the “crushing” but also in the fact that a “stone” does it in both texts, which strengthens the likeliness of an allusion.


LXX Θ for the Greek. The English translation is from the Aramaic.
here. Just like the kingdom of God will crush the opposing nations, even so those who reject Jesus will face a similar end.

Fourth, Jesus uses some of the same terminology to refer to eschatological figures or events that one finds in Daniel.⁵⁸³ In the following texts, Jesus warns about a “desolating sacrilege,” which is language used in Daniel to speak of the pagan overlords’ pollution of the temple.

Daniel 11:31 LXX: “Forces sent by him shall occupy and profane the temple and fortress. They shall abolish the regular burnt offering and set up the abomination that makes desolate (βδέλυγμα ἐρημώσεως).”

Mark 13:14: “But when you see the desolating sacrilege (τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως) set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains;”

Matthew 24:15: “So when you see the desolating sacrilege (τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως) standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand)….”

This does not mean that Daniel and Jesus necessarily have the same thing in mind when using this language, but it does show that Jesus adopted the language of Daniel as a means of referring to future pestilence in language that his audience would most likely associate with Daniel.

Fifth, Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed resembles Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 4.⁵⁸⁴ In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a tree and explains it in the following way:

Upon my bed this is what I saw; there was a tree at the center of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew great and strong, its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the ends of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful, its fruit abundant, and it provided food for all. The animals of the field found shade under it, the birds of the air nested in its branches, and from it all living beings were fed (Daniel 4:10-12).

In the interpretation of this dream, Daniel identifies this great tree with Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom (Dan. 4:22). The tree thus symbolizes the protective effects of the Babylonian empire.

---

If we skip forward to Jesus in the Gospels, Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed borrows imagery from Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of Daniel 4:

He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches (Matt. 13:31-2; cf. Luke 13:18-19).

Commentators have often noted that mustard plants rarely become large enough to be considered a “tree” where birds build their nests, though they do grow rapidly. This incongruity with real mustard plants should not cause undo discussion about the accuracy of Jesus’ botanical knowledge, but should instead throw greater weight behind a likely allusion to Daniel 4. Just as Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom had grown large and had become a nesting place for the peoples of the world, even so the kingdom of God, despite its humble beginnings, would likewise impact the world scene.

Finally, the Gospels utilize the enigmatic figure of Daniel 7:13 who is “like a son of man (LXX: υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου)” to explicate Jesus and his mission. In Daniel’s vision, the one “like a son of man” receives the kingdoms of the world after the Ancient One defeats the beasts. In the Gospels, the phrase “Son of Man (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου)” is almost ubiquitously found on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels, with the only exception being John 12:34 where the people are interrogatively quoting Jesus’ own words. Biblical scholars have long debated how Jesus used the phrase “Son of Man,” since its Aramaic equivalent was used as a circumlocution for oneself as well. Certainly several of the Son of Man sayings fit into this category. However, there are a number of sayings that clearly betray the influence of Daniel 7, which connect Jesus directly with the Son of Man figure in Daniel. At his trial before the religious leaders, Jesus is asked if

---

he is the Christ. He responds, “I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). Though some argue that the connection between Jesus and the Son of Man in Daniel 7 was the creation of the early church, the fact that the church quickly discontinued use of the title suggests that this connection stems from Jesus himself. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the Gospel writers make this connection, identifying Jesus as the Danielic Son of Man and the one who ushers in the kingdom that would judge evil and restore God’s people.

---

587 Other sayings also seem to have lucid connections with Daniel 7: Mk. 8:30//Matt. 16:27//Luke 9:26; Mk. 13:26//Matt. 24:30//Luke 21:27; Mk. 14:62//Matt. 26:64//Luke 22:67-9. Vermes argues these passages do not go back to Jesus, and one is forced to reckon with the fact that connecting Jesus with Daniel’s Son of Man would be ripe for exploitation by Christian theologians. However, although Vermes’ interpretation of the Son of Man sayings as a circumlocution for oneself can be verified in some cases, it is peculiar that only Jesus uses the phrase to speak of himself in the Gospels. If it were a common circumlocution, why are not others using it to speak of themselves too? When other characters do use the phrase “Son of Man” (John 12:34), it is always when people cite or refer to things that were first said by Jesus in the narratives. In fact, the oft-cited observation that, outside of Jesus’ usage in the Gospels, there are only a few passages that equate Jesus with the Son of Man holds true (Acts 7:56; Heb. 2:6; Rev. 1:13 and 14:14). Hebrews 2:6 is a citation of Psalm 8:4 and Revelation 1:13 and 14:14 could simply be dependent upon Danielic influence. Acts 7:56 could also be borrowing imagery from Daniel or simply dependent upon Jesus’ own words. In short, even the passages outside of the Gospels that use the phrase “Son of Man” do not necessarily betray that this originated in the early church. If this phrase were an invention of the church, one is hard-pressed to explain why the Gospels consistently have Jesus as the one connecting himself to the Son of Man figure of Daniel while Paul (especially in 1 Thessalonians where it would have helped his argument) and some of the other writers of the New Testament never adopt it. Still the dearth of the Son of Man references in the rest of the New Testament, especially when such equations would have been expedient, does invoke the criterion of dissimilarity in its favor. Though Vermes is fully aware of this fact, he fails to acknowledge how it undermines his conclusion. See Vermes, Jesus the Jew, 160-86. Casey, who follows a position similar to Vermes is forced to posit a complicated origin of the association with Daniel, but does not satisfactorily explain why such an association fails to influence other New Testament writings that anticipate the second coming as well. See Maurice Casey, Son of Man: The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7 (London: SPCK, 1979), 224-39. Thus, it seems preferable to follow those who contend that Jesus did in fact make some connection between the ambiguous “Son of Man” figure in Daniel 7 and himself on at least a few occasions. See Richard Bauckham, “Son of Man: ‘A Man in My Position’ or ‘Someone,’” JSNT 23 (1985): 23-33; I. Howard Marshall, “Son of Man,” in Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, 775-81; Allison, Constructing Jesus, 293-303; and James D.G. Dunn, Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 86-7.

588 So James D. G. Dunn, “The Danielic Son of Man in the New Testament,” in The Book of Daniel, 545-7 and I. Howard Marshall, “The Hope of a New Age: The Kingdom of God in the New Testament,” Themelios 11, no. 1 (1985): 11. Some have tried to see Jesus’ reference to the “Son of Man” as an individual or an angel other than himself. E.g. Collins, “Influence of Daniel,” 105. Allison suggests a similar conclusion, but still notes that if Jesus viewed the Son of Man as some kind of “heavenly Dopplegänger” it does not mean that Jesus was no longer the primary figure in his eschatology. See Allison, Constructing Jesus, 296-303. This is where the use of “Son of Man” as a circumlocution for the self is relevant. If Jesus uses the phrase as a circumlocution for himself in some instances, it seems likely that when he makes the connection with Daniel, he is making the affirmations about himself rather than another figure.
The aforementioned influences of Daniel upon the Gospels reveal that Daniel’s eschatological language permeates the Gospels, making it quite likely that they are also adopting Daniel’s chronology too. In fact, we can likely assume that Daniel influenced Jesus’ own understanding of himself and what God was about to do for his people.\textsuperscript{589} The apocalyptic imagery found in the dreams and visions of Daniel could be concretely connected with the ministry and events of Jesus’ life. Probably the most prominent feature in the Gospels is identifying Jesus as God’s agent, Daniel’s Son of Man, that would usher in the kingdom of God. Because he served this role, Jesus could declare the “time” of the kingdom’s arrival, and he could reveal to his followers the “mystery” of the kingdom. Those who stumbled over him would reap the effects of opposing the kingdom. All of these similarities reveal that the Gospel writers, and likely Jesus himself, adopted Daniel’s eschatological expectations of God’s future judgment on the foreign nations and the restoration of his people.

In summary, we have seen that Jesus’ central message, the proclamation of God’s kingdom, evoked the larger narrative of Israel that was still in progress. The kingdom of God symbolized God’s authority over the nations on the geopolitical scene. As a result of Israel’s covenant infidelity, God had allowed certain pagan empires to dominate his people. However, when Israel’s God chose to act, he would bring these nations to justice and rescue his faithful people from their plight. When Jesus announced the arrival of the kingdom of God, he proclaimed that God was acting or about to act to bring restoration to his people. Thus, even Jesus’ central message of the kingdom of God is rooted in the larger narrative of Israel and her hopes for restoration.

\textsuperscript{589} Collins, “Influence of Daniel,” 93. Here the author makes the following point: “If Jesus’ outlook was eschatological, it is likely that he understood the Book of Daniel to refer to his own time and to the near future.”
4.G. Cleansing of the Temple

Other actions that Jesus performs orient him into the world of Jewish restoration theology. In Jesus’ final week before the crucifixion, he brazenly ventured into a central symbol of ancient Israel, the temple, and proceeded to chase out the moneychangers and those selling sacrifices in the temple courts (Mk 11:15-19; Matt. 21:12-17; Luke 19:45-48). Though some scholars think the action was nondescript and likely went unnoticed, others suggest this event drew the ire of the Jerusalem leadership and was the primary catalyst of his death.

Regardless of its relation to his death several days later, what prompted Jesus to do it? What was wrong with the temple that elicited Jesus’ response? It is difficult to defend the view that Jesus takes umbrage with the fact that the Israelites were not offering their own sacrifices but buying them from the merchants as Chilton suggests. Deuteronomy had long before sanctioned the buying and selling of sacrifices, particularly for those who had long commutes to the temple:

But if, when the Lord your God has blessed you, the distance is so great that you are unable to transport [the tithes], because the place where the Lord your God will choose to set his name is too far away from you, then you may turn it into money. With the money secure in hand, go to the place that the Lord your God will choose; spend the money for whatever you wish—oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever you desire. And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your household rejoicing together (Deut. 14:24-6).

Though it is possible Jesus objected to such a practice, Deuteronomy condones buying one’s sacrifices in the provenance of Jerusalem. Moreover, paying the required half-shekel tax to the temple would have required some kind of currency exchange (Exod. 30:11-16). Clearly selling sacrifices to the out-of-towners or exchanging their foreign currency for the local fare was hardly sacrilegious, and it is unlikely that Jesus objects to this.

---

The only explanation of Jesus’ motives in the Gospels’ abbreviated accounts are located in Jesus’ words. In a short pastiche, that combines sayings from Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jesus utters an indictment against the temple: “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers” (Mark 11:17). Although the saying reveals Jesus’ alignment with the former prophets’ indictment of the temple, it is not entirely clear what Jesus finds objectionable in the temple on the basis of these statements. Perhaps one clue can be found in Mark’s longer description of the Temple as “a house of prayer for all nations.” Since the merchants had set up shop in the temple, the most likely locale was within the Court of the Gentiles. Moreover, some scholars have suggested that selling sacrifices within the temple was a recent development occurring precisely around the time Jesus would have been there, which would make such a practice unprecedented. If the exchange of sacrifices were set up in the Court of the Gentiles, it is possible that this particular venue precluded the Gentiles from being able to worship in the temple, which was the temple’s eschatological function.

In one of the more influential works on this subject, E.P. Sanders contends that the traditional interpretation of Jesus’ temple action as cleansing or purifying the temple is unwarranted. In contrast, Sanders argues that the temple incident was a prophetic action meant to symbolize its future desolation. For him, the action in the temple should be interpreted not in

---

591 Citing here Isa 56:7 and Jer. 7:11. I use Mark since it is likely the earliest.
592 Emphasis is mine. See Joel Marcus, Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 792. As Marcus observes, Mark’s inclusion of Gentiles is at variance with other Jewish expectation of the Temple’s restoration, which would prohibit certain ethnicities. See 4Q174.
594 Some have made the observation that this introduction of the merchants had only recently occurred under Caiaphas. E.g. Victor Eppstein, “The Historicity of the Gospel Account of the Cleansing of the Temple,” ZNW 55 (1964): 42-58 and Chilton, “Eucharist,” 24. If so, then the recent innovation could explain Jesus’ visceral reaction.
light of its probable venue or the words on Jesus’ lips, but on the basis of Jesus’ other predictions of the Temple’s destruction and rebuilding. He writes:

On the hypothesis presented here the action and the saying form a unity. Jesus predicted (or threatened) the destruction of the temple and carried out an action symbolic of its destruction by demonstrating against the performance of the sacrifices. He did not wish to purify the temple, either of dishonest trading or of trading in contrast to ‘pure’ worship. Nor was he opposed to the temple sacrifices which God commanded to Israel. He intended, rather, to indicate that the end was at hand and that the temple would be destroyed, so that the new and perfect temple might arise.

I think Sanders is right to see a foreboding warning about the temple’s ominous future in Jesus’ actions in the temple.

If anything, the Markan “sandwich” of the cursed fig tree that bookends the temple incident certainly suggests that Jesus’ actions presaged the temple’s devastation. In the account of Mark, on Jesus’ journey into Jerusalem on that day, he curses the fruitless tree saying, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again” (Mark 11:14). Immediately after uttering this judgment on the fig tree, Jesus enters the temple and chases out the money changers. The following pericope recounts the disciples walking past the cursed fig tree and noticing that it had withered “to its roots” (Mark 11:20). Since the cursing of the fig tree and its withering immediately surrounds the temple incident, Mark intends his readers to draw a connection between the fig tree and the temple incident. The tree’s lack of fruitfulness that warrants judgment mirrors the temple’s lack of fruitfulness, which will likewise result in its judgment. Thus, Sanders is right to see the temple incident as a prophetic action that depicts the future judgment of the temple.

---

597 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 75.
598 Ibid., 76. He does, however, concede that there is no surety that the meaning of Jesus’ action was “self-evident” to his contemporaries.
With that being said, I do not think this requires us to jettison the notion that Jesus desired a reform or cleansing of the temple as well. It could just as likely have both dimensions in view with the current practices in the temple precipitating its future judgment. It very well could be that Jesus found the activities in the temple reprehensible and believed they were stymieing the temple from fulfilling its eschatological role of ushering the Gentiles into the worship of God and being a place designated for prayer. Because the current temple regime had kept the temple from fulfilling its raison d’être, God would act in judgment.

Regardless of how one interprets the intention behind the action, the temple incident again helps us situate Jesus within the world of the first century. The temple was a central symbol of God’s presence with his covenant people throughout Jewish history. It sat upon Mt. Zion, the place where God had chosen to make his name dwell. It was the place where God’s glory had left during the exile, and it was the center of hope for coming restoration. The expectation was that, when God restored his people, his glory would again come to dwell in the temple. When Jesus overturns the tables and chases out the livestock jockeys in the temple, it is not indicating that Jesus preferred a spiritualized form of religion over one performed through cultic rites and sacrifices. Rather, Jesus is performing a messianic action that clearly situates him within the larger world of Jewish eschatology and God’s restoration of his people.

---

600 In response to Sander’s conclusion that the Gospel writers tried to soften Jesus’ prophecy against the temple and make the issue about the temple’s purity, I find Evans’ counter-arguments more compelling: Craig A. Evans, “Jesus’ Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction,” CBQ 51 no. 2 (1989): 237-270, esp. 238-40.
601 Witherington, Mark, 315-6.
603 Ezekiel records the movements of God’s glory as it leaves the Holy of Holies and eventually the city of Jerusalem altogether. See Ezekiel 8:4; 9:3; 10:18-19; 11:22-25.
604 McKelvey, New Temple, 74.
rebuilds it. In this light, Meyer’s words capture the significance of the event well: “It was at once a fulfillment event and a sign of the future, pledging the restoration of temple, Zion, and Jerusalem. Since these were symbol and synecdoche for the whole people of God, the cleansing of the temple pledged the perfect restoration of Israel.”

Thus, like we have seen in several other texts, the cleansing of the temple is a symbolic gesture that hearkens to the larger narrative of Israel waiting for restoration, which is captured here when Jesus proceeds to call for reform of the central religious symbol in their world.

4.H. The Wicked Tenants and the Rejected Stone

While one would hesitate to call the parable of the wicked tenants and its closing quotation of Psalm 118:22-3 an essential piece of evidence that situates Jesus in the larger story of Israel, the emphasis that both Girard and Schwager place upon this passage warrants such analysis in this project. Both of them find the identification of Jesus as the rejected stone as constitutive of the gospel message, since it alludes to Jesus’ future rejection by the masses in a way that also connotes mimetic rivalry. While I think Schwager and Girard are correct in seeing the passage as an allusion to Christ’s future victimization, I believe the passage indicates how Jesus’ followers fulfill dimensions of restoration theology, which Schwager and Girard miss because they fail to read the Gospels in light of Israel’s larger narrative.

In all three Gospels, the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18) occurs after Jesus’ cleansing of the temple and the negative response this elicits from the Jerusalem leadership. In light of such a setting, the parable of the wicked tenants seeks

---

605 Sib. Or. 5.414-33 and Pss. Sol. 17.21-32.
607 Schwager, Scapegoats, 141. For him, “…the passage about the rejected stone sums up the gospel.” As noted earlier, it also functions as a hermeneutical key to the Gospel message for Schwager. Cf. Girard, Things Hidden, 195; idem, Evolution and Conversion, 168.
to explain that, even though Jesus is the Messianic redeemer endowed with God’s authority, he will still face rejection and death at the hands of the leadership. In the parable, a landowner plants a vineyard and leases it to some tenants. At the time of harvest, he sends for his share of the produce. The servants he sends are turned away empty-handed after being brutalized. After seeing his servants severely rebuffed, the owner sends his son, hoping that he would be respected. However, the tenants conspire against this final courier too, knowing that he is the coming heir. They slay him upon arrival. Jesus then asks his audience what will happen when the owner comes to the vineyard. The ensuing answer anticipates that the owner will come and enact vengeance upon them.

Most scholars observe the latent symbolism present in the parable. In Isaiah 5:1-7, Israel is depicted as YHWH’s fruitless vineyard and is thereby threatened with punishment. Jesus’

---

608 Some have argued that the parable of the wicked husbandmen contravenes the notion that the Son was sent to die since the purpose of his mission was to collect the produce of the vineyard (Finlan, Options on Atonement, 37-8.). There are two things that can be said in response. First, this is asking too much of the parables. It is essentially asking them to be full-blown theological explanations when in fact the parables were told to make a specific point. The point in the context is not explaining the theological implications of the son’s death, but indicating what would happen if the leadership continued on its course of rejection. As Hans Frei says, we have to privilege the final Passion accounts over the sayings if the Gospels are going to be utilized as Christological sources (Frei, Identity of Jesus, 141). Second, in Mark’s version of the story, which has some of the servants being killed, the father has to at least reckon with the possibility that his son would receive similar treatment. Many commentators have noted the naiveté of the father for believing that his son would be exempt from the brutality that the former servants had met. While the internal psychology of the father is not made explicit here, one might suggest the death of the son was a risk the father was willing to take. After all, the story is not one about being a cautious and protective parent but about YHWH’s manifold, yet unsuccessful, attempts to woo Israel throughout her history. The most recent stage of this pursuit was in the person of Jesus who would have likely seen the very real possibility that he could face death like his predecessor, John the Baptist. While it is certainly going too far to say this parable invokes some kind of atonement theology, it is also pressing the parable too far to say it entirely precludes such a view as Finlan does.

609 There is variation across the Synoptics on the number of servants sent and the nature of the brutality received.

610 In Matthew, the people make this pronouncement (Matt. 21:41) whereas Luke has Jesus saying this. For Girard, it is essential that Matthew has the crowds assuming God will return judgment upon the culprits since this distances Jesus from threats of divine violence. In Mark, however, the speaker is ambiguous, which probably explains why there is a retraction on this point (Mark 12:9). Matthew and Luke both clear up the ambiguity, but do so in different directions. Matthew’s difference from Luke can be explained as an attempt to assimilate the indictment of this parable with that of the previous one, the one about the two sons. In the previous parable, Jesus’ interlocutors blissfully pronounce their own judgment (Matt. 21:31), which is precisely what they do in Matt. 21:41. Thus, although Girard is invested in seeing Matthew as original, it could in fact be an intentional retraction in light of its literary context. See Wesley G. Olmstead, Matthew’s Trilogy of Parables: The Nation, the Nations and the Reader in Matthew 21.28-22.14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 114.
parable of the wicked tenants employs the same symbol, with an innovative wrinkle. As in Isaiah, Israel is the vineyard, and God is the planter. However, the addition of the other actors in the storyline adds a complexity to the allegory absent in Isaiah. The wicked tenants are the leadership that questions Jesus’ authority and seeks his demise. The son in the parable is most certainly Jesus, which is confirmed by the way in which the language of sonship is applied to Jesus throughout the rest of the Gospels. The parable thus anticipates the coming rejection of Jesus, which culminates in his execution on the cross.

The parable ends with the threat of punishment for those rejecting the son, at which point, the Synoptics cite Psalm 118:22-3: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing and it is amazing in our eyes?” (Mark 12:10-1). The parable ends on the dismal note of the son’s lynching, but the quotation of the Psalm indicates the son will be vindicated, which occurs at the resurrection of Christ. While some have argued that the citation of Psalm 118 is a later addition and that the parable was originally independent of the Psalm, it must be acknowledged that the parable and citation are linguistically integrated in their current form, though it might be missed in English and Greek. The son of the parable (בן) linguistically connects with the following quotation about the stone (אבן),

611 Jack D. Kingsbury, “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen and the Secret of Jesus’ Divine Sonship in Matthew: Some Literary-Critical Observations,” JBL 105, no. 4 (1986): 645. The larger thesis of the paper argues that this parable would have been the first time that Jesus publicly announced his divine sonship to the public, giving Matthew’s gospel a similar yet unique form of Messianic secrecy. Moreover, in Luke-Acts, Peter’s sermon in Acts 4 identifies the builders as the Jewish leadership and the rejected stone as Jesus. As in the parable of the wicked tenants, Peter quotes from Psalm 118, saying, “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone” (Acts 4:11). The statement is directed at the “rulers, elders, and scribes,” of whom only Caiaphas, John, and Alexander are named (Acts 4:5-6). The repeated quotation of the verse in Luke-Acts clarifies that only the Jewish leadership is in view and not the Jewish people as a whole.


614 France, Mark, 462-4.

615 Crossan, Historical Jesus, 351.
suggesting the quotation from the Psalm and the parable of the wicked tenants were meant to hang together as a unit.\footnote{616}

There are several elements in the text so far that indicate more is in view than simply the vindication of the rejected son/stone. First, the setting of the parable and the citation from Psalm 118 occur within the larger context of Jesus’ cleansing of the temple and the questioning of his authority. In all likelihood, the evangelists see the parable and Psalm revealing more about the future plight of the temple. In fact, the later prediction of the temple’s destruction in Luke 21:6, which speaks of “not one stone” being left on top of another, connects the usage of the word “stone” with the temple.\footnote{617} Second, the language of the “stone,” though not always connected with the temple in the prophetic literature, often was. Zechariah 4 is typical in this regard:

What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’ Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it (Zech 4:7-9a).\footnote{618}

In a similar vein, Isaiah prophesies:

He [YHWH] will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for both houses of Israel he will become a rock one stumbles over—a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken (Isa. 8:14-15).

In these passages the stone is essential in the edifice of the temple, and it is likely that the evangelists intended this allusion. In fact, the allusion to Isaiah 8:14 is made explicit in Matthew and Luke with the additional description of these being the stone upon which people will stumble: “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on


\footnote{618} The Targum Jonathan interprets this messianically, expecting the revelation of the messiah. See Pinkhos Churgin, Targum Jonathan to the Prophets (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1907), 124-5.
whom it falls” (Luke 20:18). Third, Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5—the subtext for the parable of the preceding wicked tenants—was connected with the Temple in Jewish interpretation. The “watchtower” that the vineyard owner erects in Isaiah 5:2 is interpreted as the temple in the Targum of Isaiah. Combining the parable’s literary context with the way in which the prophetic literature used stones in conjunction with the temple’s reconstruction, the parable is about more than simply Jesus’ rejection and vindication. It pronounces an indictment on the temple in Jesus’ day.

The episode, therefore, advances at least two important things. First, the passage condemns those who oppose Jesus, particularly those upset about his recent actions in the temple. Jesus’ comments in the passage rankle the leadership (Luke 20:19) and for good reason. They insinuate that “the present Temple and its present regime were regarded as part of the collection of the evil kingdoms.” Those who were plotting to lynch the son of the vineyard owner had set themselves up in opposition to the vineyard owner himself. Second, Jesus’ statements suggest that he is forming a community or a movement that will essentially function as the temple’s replacement. When Jesus adopts the Psalm’s use of the “cornerstone” to speak of himself and his movement, Jesus is doing something analogous to the Qumran community’s application of this particular text. In the Scrolls, we find a peculiar instance where the Qumran

---

619 I use Luke’s version here since it is more secure in the textual tradition. Matthew 21:44, the corresponding verse in Matthew, still seems to warrant inclusion in the textual tradition. Only D, 33, several of the old Latin versions, the Sinaitic Syriac version, Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius omit the verse. The majority of manuscripts clearly favor the inclusion of the verse with support from several important manuscripts like: Θ, B, C, L, W Z, Δ, Θ, 0102, 0233, family 1 and 13, and the Byzantine text type. Thus, the external evidence supports the inclusion. Moreover, the best explanation for a later entrance into the textual tradition would be a desire to harmonize the passage with Luke 20:18, which can be discounted because the wording in Luke and Matthew are significantly different. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 47.

620 Tg. Isaiah 5.2: “I sanctified them, and I made them glorious, I propped them up as a precious vine; and I built my sanctuary in the midst of them; and I gave also mine altar to make an atonement for their sins; and I thought that they should do good works before me, but they did evil works” (trans. Pauli).

621 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 500-01. Cf. Olmstead, Matthew’s Trilogy, 117.

622 In fact, the rending of the Temple veil during Jesus’ crucifixion in Mark 15:39 again points to the fact that Jesus functions as the replacement for the Temple cult. See also John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 31-3.
community defined itself as a “precious cornerstone” and hence as a new “House of Holiness for Aaron.” In being a “cornerstone” they were functioning as a new temple, since their particular community rejected the Jerusalem temple because it had been commandeered by the wrong kinds of priests. Thus, there was a tendency within Second Temple Judaism to spiritualize the temple and locate it within the community that was following YHWH. It is not too much to think that Jesus, in appropriating the cornerstone language about himself, is making a similar conclusion. In other words, when the Jerusalem leadership rejected the son, judgment would fall upon the leadership of Israel, which would result in the son’s vindication. This vindication would also extend to those who followed Jesus because they would construct a “new people-temple.” Taken together, the passage indicates that the expected eschatological temple would find its fulfillment in Jesus and his movement, rather than the edifice currently sitting on Mt. Zion.

Because of the latent replacement theology, the parable and the saying have been under pressure in recent decades to suppress any anti-Jewish content or meaning. Though such efforts are understandable, such ideological agendas have distorted the parable’s plain sense.

---

623 1QS VIII, 5-11 (Vermes). The atoning function of the community mentioned in this passage likewise corroborates the cultic function of the community, even in its isolation from the Jerusalem establishment. For another example possibly along the same lines, though it is difficult to determine if the temple is actually present or simply expected in the new Israel, see 4Q174.

624 4Q174 speaks of a “sanctuary of men” that will function as a Temple offering sacrifices that are “the works of the Law.” For further commentary on the subject, see McKelvey, New Temple, 46-53.


626 E.g. Aaron A. Milavec, “Mark’s Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen as Reaffirming God’s Predilection for Israel,” Journal of Ecumenical Studies 26, no. 2 (1989): 289-312; Tania Oldenhage, “How to Read a Tainted Text: The Wicked Husbandmen in a Post-Holocaust Context,” in Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible: A Reader, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2001), 165-76. Milavec seeks to recover an “original meaning” that was not anti-Semitic while Oldenhage attempts to find a contemporary application that makes the metaphorical connection between the “extravagant” use of force against the son and the suffering in the Holocaust. Neither seems fully compelling because of the ideological agendas at play in the hermeneutics.
meaning.627 This is not to say that the parable is anti-Semitic. After all, the vineyard of Isaiah (Israel) is not destroyed in the parable of the wicked tenants; the vineyard is kept and only the tenants (i.e. the leadership) are deposed in judgment.628 Only in Matthew do we see an explicit mention of the transfer of the kingdom of God from the Jerusalem leadership to the ἔθνος (Matt. 21:43) that performs the fruit of the kingdom. The reference to the ἔθνος indicates that a “trans-ethnic community of believers” will “replace the nation of Israel as subjects of the reign of God.”629 However, this does not mean that the Gentiles have supplanted the Jews in a supersessionistic state of affairs because Jews still make up part of this multi-ethnic group of believers.630 Rather, just as Isaiah’s warning implied that Israel could not presume her election would insulate her from the curses of the covenant, even so Jesus warns the leadership that their ethnicity was no guarantee of God’s deliverance.631 In view is the larger expectation that God’s restoration of the world would bring in the Gentiles to worship Israel’s God too. Thus, the passage again situates Jesus within the expectation that God would construct an eschatological temple, which has now become a spiritual reality in which both Jews and Gentiles participate.

627 Snodgrass, “Wicked Tenants,” 191-3. He also argues that the usual lament of anti-Semitism here is overblown in that the wicked tenants are equated with the Jewish leadership, not the people. Jesus and his disciples, after all, were Jewish, so one cannot argue that the text is inherently anti-Semitic. One of the main arguments in his review of the parable’s interpretation concerns the distortion of the parable’s meaning that occurs when people try to eliminate any form of judgment in the parable.
628 Harrington, Matthew, 304-5.
629 Olmstead, Matthew’s Trilogy, 117.
630 Ibid. He writes, “It will not do to identify this ἔθνος, on the one hand, merely as a new leadership group for Israel or, on the other, simply as the Gentiles who displace the Jews. This nation that God raises up in faithfulness to his promises to Abraham is defined along ethical—not ethnic lines, and … this ethical description of the new people functions both as an indictment of those now rejected and as a warning to those who would not be rejected.”
4.I. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to show that the New Testament Gospels are not simply ready-made solutions in search of some kind of cultural or human problem to solve. They are narratives that presuppose the larger story of Israel and the problem or “state of deprivation” developed in that story. The previous chapter adumbrated Israel’s canonical history, showing that she had been elected by YHWH to be his covenant partner. The covenant held out the hope of blessing should Israel maintain the covenant. Israel, however, abrogated the covenantal expectations, which resulted in exile under the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Despite the infidelity of his covenant partner, God promised to act on behalf of his people to redeem them from their exilic plight. Israel’s prophets spoke of a new age, an age wherein YHWH would bring his people back to the land in a new exodus. When he brought his people back to the land, he would renew the covenantal relationship with them in a new covenant when he forgave their sin, the divine spirit would be imparted to God’s people to transform them, a new Davidic king would lead his people to righteousness and reign over God’s kingdom, and the temple would be purified or rebuilt so the nations could come and worship Israel’s God. While it is possible to say that the Babylonian exile officially terminated upon the return under Cyrus, I argued in the previous chapter that the Jewish people continued to expect a fuller restoration from their exilic conditions after the return under Cyrus. In other words, they still had not experienced full restoration from exile, though some of their sufferings were alleviated in periods of political autonomy or outright freedom in the centuries following the exile.

The story of Israel inheriting the land of promise, her exile from the land, and anticipated restoration form the prelude to the Synoptic Gospels, constituting the “state of deprivation” that needs remedied. As we saw in this chapter, all the Synoptic evangelists take up Israel’s hopes
for restoration and direct them onto Jesus whom they identify as the central figure in God’s program of restoration. The authors identify Jesus’ ministry as the fulfillment of the restoration depicted in Second Isaiah, with Jesus as the central character. According to them, the very “good news” that Second Isaiah anticipated was coming to pass in the narratives the Gospels were telling about Jesus. Moreover, the Gospels inform us that Jesus’ pedigree allows him to be the rightful heir to the Davidic covenant, and he can therefore fulfill the hope for an eschatological ruler who would conquer Israel’s enemies and lead God’s people in righteousness. At his baptism, Jesus is identified as the one who baptizes others with the divine Spirit and he assumes the Spirit-anointed role of the Son of God and God’s servant. In addition, the main message of Jesus, namely that the kingdom of God had drawn near, likewise invoked the same story of Israel’s hopes for restoration being fulfilled. Furthermore, Jesus’ symbolic actions also recalled those same hopes. Jesus’ choice of twelve disciples symbolized the restoration of Israel’s twelve tribes in a new exodus. His cleansing of the temple called Israel’s central religious symbol to embody its eschatological role, which required its purification and welcoming of the Gentiles. Though more expressions of restoration are present within the Synoptics, what has been identified reveals that the Gospels are not narratives that stand on their own. They are narratives that presume the presence of Israel’s larger story, and Jesus is a saving figure becomes he brings this story to its long awaited climax.632

This observation that the Synoptic Gospels presuppose an existing narrative, however imbedded in the Jewish worldview, is important for contemporary theology. It reveals that the Gospels are not solutions in search of a “state of deprivation” in order to make them complete or to establish Jesus as a saving figure. They already contain a presupposed “state of deprivation” wherein Jesus brings about the “state of release.” For them, the “state of deprivation” is Israel’s

632 Tan, Zion Traditions, 219, 235.
period of being under God’s judgment during the exile and its lingering effects. Israel had yet to experience the restoration of its people, and this is the problem or “state of deprivation” that Jesus overcomes according to the Synoptics. The question for contemporary theology is whether their description of the “state of deprivation” is normative for current theological reflection or whether there is freedom to exchange it for another construct.

There are several considerations that suggest subsequent interpretation of the Christ event should follow the path marked out by the evangelists. First, the Synoptic evangelists address various audiences. Matthew appears to be writing to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles, though the constituency seems to tilt toward a majority of Jewish folks since he sees no need to include Mark’s explanations of Jewish customs. Mark, however, must explain Jewish purity laws and other customs to his readers, which indicates his audience was mostly composed of Gentiles who were unfamiliar with such customs. Luke ends his two volume work with an indictment of Jewish obstinacy and hopes that the Gentiles would instead receive the Gospel. This rather pessimistic ending regarding the Jewish reception of the Gospel makes little sense if Luke’s readers are Jewish, suggesting the intended recipients were Gentile. Moreover, Luke’s excision of issues like law-keeping that would have been important for Jewish readers corroborates the conclusion. While the evangelists demonstrate freedom to shape their material in order to emphasize what was most relevant for their respective audiences, all of them find it necessary to situate Jesus within Israel’s larger story. Certainly the predominantly Gentile settings were not without other possible “states of deprivation” that could have been constructed.

out of existential and theological material. Still, the Synoptic writers reveal a uniform conviction that Jesus is the savior within Israel’s larger story of the world. This suggests that, even though the Gospel writers exhibit freedom to omit certain selections of Jesus’ teaching or restructure it for the needs of their communities, they believed the larger story of Israel was essential for understanding the person and mission of Jesus, whether or not their readership had already adopted such a worldview as their own.

Second, there is a particular kind of privilege that should be afforded the Gospel writers along with others who propagated the early Christian kerygma. They were, after all, the first ones to proclaim Jesus as the savior. If modern Christians are going to stand with them and claim that Jesus is the savior, then it seems incumbent upon modern interpreters to ensure that their understanding of how Jesus saves at least coheres with those who first made the proclamation. If these original Christians had not identified and proclaimed Jesus as God’s agent for restoring Israel, Jesus would simply be a name in Josephus’ accounts of failed messianic imposters, and only historians would know anything about him. It is only because Jesus could be identified as Israel’s agent for restoration that the early Christians proclaimed that Jesus was God’s savior. Only because of their testimony are people making the same claims today. If Jesus’ story is not connected to any preceding history, but can be extracted and inserted into any soteriological construct of our choosing, then Jesus as a historically situated first century Jew no longer plays a necessarily central role in the divine drama. He could simply be interchanged with some other figure that speaks to the existential plight of humankind.

These considerations indicate that soteriology’s task is not to find a “state of deprivation” that will make the Christ event relevant for our age. Rather, the task is to find a way of extending the story that the Gospels tell so that it can be our story as well. This is not to deny
interpreters the ability of utilizing modern advancements in human psychology or awareness of our existential deprivations, but instead to say that these cannot become the sum total of the human need for salvation. They can be utilized to extrapolate the human “state of deprivation” to the degree that it helps explain Israel’s own plight waiting for God’s restoration. The need for understanding how the story of Jesus is relevant to the twenty-first century will remain, but it does not give us freedom to revise that story in order create relevance. Either the story of Jesus as told in the Gospels is relevant for people today or Jesus is no savior at all. If Jesus is going to cease being the proverbial wax nose that is bent to justify every single theological program, then we must at least anchor Jesus within the historical context of his world, which was deeply informed by the larger story of God’s dealings with Israel.637

With this in mind, we can return to our conversation with Girard. While Girard has constructed a compelling soteriological structure that puts Jesus at the transition point between humanity’s “state of deprivation” and the “state of release,” he can only do so by placing Jesus and the biblical texts within the larger story of the scapegoat mechanism and the primordial origins of human beings. The revelatory uniqueness of the Bible can only be discovered when Girard reads the biblical texts vis-à-vis mythological texts. Only when these other literary works are placed beside the biblical texts does the truth of the Bible emerge. Though Girard is able to identify allusions in the Gospels that might betray an awareness of the scapegoat mechanism—some of which can be downright uncanny—sometimes these identifications are unsatisfying or incomplete. What is more troubling, though, is the fact that Girard has little to say about a great deal of the restoration theology present in the Gospels. Most of it is ignored or reframed in

637 Appeal to historical contexts has always been done to rein in the excesses of theological development. Johannes Weiss, for example, published Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God as a corrective to his own father-in-law’s (Albrecht Ritschl) view of the kingdom. See Richard H. Hiers and David Larrimore Holland, introduction to Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, ed. and trans. Richard H. Hiers and David L. Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 1-54.
support of his soteriology. One can at least wonder if Frei’s fears have come true in Girard. The interpretive explanation found in the “story behind the story” has become enamoring to the point that the original story presupposed by the Gospels no longer appears essential or relevant. While Girard is right to see Jesus as the focal point of God’s revelation and that Jesus was an innocent victim on a Roman cross, I think he misses the fuller picture that the Gospels provide regarding Jesus’ role in Israel’s restoration.

If, in contrast to Girard, we follow the Gospels and see Jesus as the individual who inaugurated Israel’s longed for restoration, then we are going to have to ask how his death and resurrection fit within this larger story. For example, does the death and resurrection of Jesus serve the more encompassing goal of restoring Israel? The next chapter will take up this very question by specifically investigating the most explicit set of passages where Jesus talks about the implications of his death with particular focus on the Last Supper sayings.
CHAPTER 5: JESUS’ DEATH AND THE RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT IN THE LAST SUPPER SAYINGS

Up to this point, we have observed the fact that the Gospels situate Jesus within the larger narrative of Israel awaiting restoration. His ministry and proclamation of the kingdom coherently fit within this larger story. However, Jesus’ life does not take the particular direction that one might expect for someone walking the dusty roads of Palestine proclaiming the imminent arrival of God’s kingdom. He summons no major army and launches no political coup. To the contrary, Jesus meets his end on a Roman cross. Instead of wresting Palestine from Roman control, he dies at their hands. For some characters in the Gospels, this ends Jesus’ bid to be Israel’s messianic deliverer. However, the authors of the Gospels, along with his closest followers, continue to affirm that Jesus, in life and in death, is the one who restores Israel. What allows the authors of the Gospels to believe that Jesus, even as a dying Messiah, still remains the one to restore Israel, especially when his death might just as well be an abysmal failure?

This chapter seeks to investigate how the Synoptic evangelists answer this question. In order to do so, we will focus our attention on the Last Supper sayings of Jesus. In each of the Synoptic Gospels, the Last Supper occurs in Jerusalem, hours before Jesus’ arrest and his crucifixion. Not only do these sayings immediately precede Jesus’ crucifixion in the Gospels, they also contain the densest and clearest articulation of the soteriological implications of Jesus’ death. Furthermore, since these sayings record the speech of the Gospels’ protagonist, they
should be afforded the utmost weight in trying to perceive how the Gospel writers—and most likely Jesus himself—understood how Jesus’ death was still a part of restoring Israel. Following what is likely their chronological order—presuming Markan priority—we will analyze how each of the Synoptics records the Last Supper sayings, draw out the theological implications of the sayings, and then observe some of the ways in which the theological implications are present or operative in other passages in the Gospels as well.

5.A. Mark

Mark, the first Gospel to be written, introduces his account of the Last Supper by framing it as a Passover celebration. The meal, as Mark describes it, occurred on “the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed” (Mark 14:12). The disciples who are aware of the date and the necessary preparations required for it ask Jesus: “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” (Mark 14:12). Jesus then delegates the task of preparation to two of his disciples. That evening (Mark 14:17), Jesus arrived with his twelve disciples and eats with his disciples one last time.

Biblical scholars have long debated whether the Last Supper was in fact a Passover meal and if it actually fell on the day of the Passover feast. Some have balked at identifying the Last Supper meal as a Passover meal since some of the elements one would expect like the Passover lamb (the main course!), bitter herbs, and unleavened bread are never mentioned. Moreover,
the chronology of the events, especially the fact that Jesus dies on the following day, complicate the possibility that the Last Supper was a Passover feast because it would be unlikely for the Romans to execute Jesus during the festival.\(^6\) In addition, Paul’s account mentions nothing about the Passover, but simply talks of “the night when he was betrayed” (1 Cor. 11:23).

Probably the most difficult issue is that the Gospel of John presents an alternative chronology that departs from the Synoptics where Jesus dies on the day of preparation for the Passover rather than the day of Passover itself. In light of these considerations, some have discounted the Last Supper’s historical association with the Passover altogether.

However, dissociating the Last Supper from the Passover celebration does not seem entirely warranted. Even if we concede the fact that later Jewish paschal traditions recorded in the Mishnah might not reflect its celebration in the first century,\(^7\) there seems to be several peculiar parallels with later paschal traditions that suggest the Last Supper was a Passover celebration of sorts.\(^8\) For example, the stipulations for Passover observance required one to eat the lamb in Jerusalem in the evening and remain within its environs for the night. All of this Jesus does, no longer returning to Bethany as he had done on previous nights.\(^9\) Moreover, the amount of preparation for the meal requiring the attention of two disciples would only be appropriate for the Passover or a similar celebration. During the meal, the *paterfamilias* would preside over its various courses and interpret the various elements, which Jesus does for at least two of the elements, and it could be presumed that he did so for the others if they were

---


\(^7\) Baruch M. Bokser, “Was the Last Supper a Passover Seder?” *Bible Review* 3, no. 2 (1987): 24-33. Bokser delivers a healthy caution by reminding us that our understanding of the Passover celebration in the first century has been constructed from the Mishnah, a much later written source.


present. In addition, they end the meal by singing a hymn (Mark 14:26), which was in accord
with Passover tradition. Finally, even if Paul does not situate the Lord’s Supper in the context of
the Passover, he still refers to Jesus as the Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7), which only makes sense if
the Jesus tradition already had a reason to connect Jesus to this festival. For these reasons, the
association between the Last Supper and the Passover cannot be dismissed as later projections
upon the text, but as part of the context in which the meal occurred. Mark, at any rate, has
certainly identified the meal as a Passover celebration in his account. As a result, many
scholars suggest that, though the meal might have been celebrated early or at variance with usual
custom, the meal was still Paschal in nature.

---


645 Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark’s Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 229. Against those who say this is a liturgical passage transposed into an institution narrative at the Passover, Casey writes, “Such assumptions have made nonsense of the narrative, with careful and explicit preparation for eating the Passover followed by eating a meal which is not a Passover meal, but which none the less contains many features of Passover meals, from beginning after dark in verse 17 to staying in greater Jerusalem at verse 26. We must take the opposite view. This source was written by an Aramaic-speaking Jew from Israel, who was writing for people who shared his cultural assumptions. He thought he told us that this was a Passover meal in verses 12-16. He expected us to know what a Passover meal was like. Therefore he did not write an account of the meal. Rather, he narrated those aspects of the meal which enable us to understand how and why Jesus died” (Ibid., 237; emphasis his).

646 Witherington, *Mark*, 371; Marshall, *Last Supper*, 75; Wright, *Victory of God*, 555-6; and Bockmuehl, *This Jesus*, 93. Recently, Casey has argued that Rabbi Joshua’s validation of Passover offerings sacrificed on Nisan 13 suggests that the great influx of pilgrims into Jerusalem required sacrifices to be performed a day early to accommodate everyone. For support, he cites m. Zebah. 1:4. See Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 226. In Neusner’s version, the same saying is in m. Zebah. 1:3: “The Passover which one slaughtered on the morning of the fourteenth [of Nisan] not for its own name [‘under some other name’]—R. Joshua declares valid, as if it were slaughtered on the thirteenth [of Nisan].” Adapted from Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), 699. The theory of different Jewish calendars with rival celebrations of the Passover was attractive to some, at least for a time: Annie Jaubert, *Date of the Last Supper*, trans. I. Rafferty (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1965); Alec Gilmore, “Date and Significance of the Last Supper,” *SJT* 14, no. 3 (1961): 256-69; Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, Zaccheus Studies (New Testament Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1988), 56, 66; and Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the Primitive Church* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), 37-48. There are, however, dissenters who conclude that Jesus had a farewell meal of some sort, but it was not in fact a Passover celebration. For this view, see Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 423-7. Others place the emphasis on the theological implications rather than trying to sort out the historical details. LaVerdiere says, “What is clear is that in Luke, as in the other synoptic gospels, the Last Supper is theologically a Christian Passover meal, and that would remain true even if it had been taken at a completely different time with no relationship to the Israelite Passover.” Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the Eucharist in the Gospel of Luke* (Chicago:
Without having to resolve the historical issues tidily, Mark’s framing of the Last Supper within the Passover celebration has important theological implications. The Passover recalled Israel’s historical past where God had miraculously intervened and rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. It is not surprising that Jesus uses this very festival that spoke of God’s past intervention to signal once more that God’s kingdom and rule was breaking into the world through the events about to transpire. If, as I argued in the previous chapter, Jesus’ story should be inlaid into the larger story of Israel, it should come as no surprise that Jesus, in the context of this festival, would draw upon Israel’s past experience of salvation to declare that God was about to intervene once again.

5.A.1. “Take; this is my body”

Mark, in keeping with paschal tradition, notes that Jesus and the twelve came in the evening to eat the meal (Mark 14:17). After a short prediction that one of the twelve would betray him (Mark 14:18-21), Mark’s account moves to some point in the middle of the meal—Mark says “while they were eating”—when Jesus “took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body’” (Mark 14:22). The import of making an equation between the bread and Jesus is difficult to ascertain because Mark does not provide much detail or any explanatory phrases. In order to provide more explanation for the meaning of this phrase, some scholars have turned to the Aramaic. Presuming that Jesus spoke in Aramaic,

---

Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 128. For a precise dating of the death of Jesus and its likely connection with the Passover chronology, see Raymond E. Brown, The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: a Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1350-1378. He seems skeptical about it being an actual Passover meal, but assumes that dating Jesus’ death close to Passover is widespread and therefore historically probable.

Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 206. In subsequent years, traditions were recorded—whether these traditions were present in the first century cannot be proven—that expected the Messiah’s return during the Passover. If they were current during the first century, then Jesus’ actions and words at the Last Supper are imbued with a heightened sense of eschatological expectation.
part of the issue hinges upon which Aramaic word was translated as σῶμα. Several options are possible. On the one hand, it could simply reflect an Aramaic idiom that was self-referential. In this case, the bread saying could simply be a reference to Jesus, meaning: “This is myself.”648 If the underlying Aramaic pointed toward Jesus’ flesh or physical body rather than his person, there might be an interesting correlation with covenant ideology. Covenants extended kinship bonds to those who would not be privy to them normally. If Jesus equated his physical body with the bread, it is possible that Jesus is extending to his disciples the kinship established by the covenant that the words over the cup will make explicit.649 Others have suggested that the reference to bread implies that Jesus was a new Passover lamb, though this is not entirely persuasive.650 If the Last Supper were a Passover celebration, then Jesus would have had a lamb at hand to use in reference to himself, and it would be likely that the tradition would have retained this as well had he said something along these lines. The absence of a saying over the lamb suggests that we are not to see the word over the bread as an identification of Jesus as the Passover lamb. Most likely the bread saying was self-referential, referring to Jesus’ own self or body in some way. In addition, the bread saying likely assumes some of the Old Testament associations with it. Deuteronomy calls the Passover bread the “bread of affliction” (Deut. 16:3), reflecting the painful process of leaving Egypt. This Old Testament connotation coupled with Jesus’ action of breaking the bread suggests that the bread symbolizes the imminent suffering

648 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:471.
649 Bernard J. Cooke, “Synoptic Presentation of the Eucharist as Covenant Sacrifice,” TS 21, no. 1 (1960): 26-7. However, this is far from certain and other meanings are possible as well. See Casey, Aramaic Sources, 220, 239.
650 John Koenig, The Feast of the World’s Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 32. Jeremias suggests both sayings, “this is my body” and “this is my blood,” designate Jesus as “the paschal lamb” (Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 223). As the Passover lamb, Jesus secures redemption for others: “Jesus describes his death as this eschatological Passover sacrifice: his vicarious ... death brings into operation the final deliverance, the new covenant of God” (Ibid., 226). I think Jeremias overstepped the evidence here for there is no suggestion that Jesus is making himself equivalent to the Passover lamb itself, even though Jeremias is correct in the conclusion he draws about the eschatological and redemptive significance of the sayings.
that Jesus was about to endure physically. To put it simply, Jesus’ words and actions over the bread emblematize his imminent suffering. Nevertheless, Jesus does not simply say that this will happen, he performs another symbolic sign, just as he did in the Temple, that forever memorializes what is going to happen to him by breaking the physical bread in front of him.


After speaking over the bread, Jesus takes a cup, blesses it, and has the disciples drink from it. The Passover meal as preserved in the Mishnah had a series of four cups, though whether the Mishnah reflects first century practice in this regard is unknown. If this particular meal followed the tradition of the four cup sequence, the readers are left ignorant of which cup it is, though some speculate that it was the third or fourth. The words over the cup are more explicative than those over the bread. Regarding the cup Jesus says, “This is my blood of the covenant (τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης), which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24).

The statement is densely packed with allusions to several important Old Testament texts. On the one hand, Jesus equates the cup with “my blood of the covenant” which basically matches Exodus 24:8 in the LXX. In Exodus 24, Moses ratifies the covenant with YHWH and does so by offering sacrifices on Mt. Sinai. To inaugurate the covenant on Mt. Sinai, Moses takes the blood from the offerings and separates it into two portions. The first portion he dashes against the altar, but the second he sprinkles on the people and says, “See the blood of the

---

651 Nolland, Matthew, 1075. Since Matthew follows Mark so closely here, Nolland’s conclusions about Matthew’s text are just as relevant to Mark.
652 Norman A. Beck, “Last Supper as an Efficacious Symbolic Act,” JBL 89, no. 2 (1970): 192-8. He differentiates between a parable, which requires an audience to make their own application, and an “efficacious symbolic act,” which retains its force even if the audience fails to understand what it connotes. Here, the sign announces what God was about to do through Jesus.
653 m. Pesah, 10.2-7 (Neusner).
654 Nolland, Matthew, 1077. The third cup was a “cup of blessing … because the after-dinner grace came with it.”
covenant (τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης) that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Exodus 24:8 LXX). Thus, when Jesus identifies the cup as his “blood of the covenant” there is a direct allusion to back to the covenant-inaugurating sacrifice on Sinai.

What is the significance of making an allusion to the covenant sacrifice on Sinai? First, the allusion establishes the fact that Israel’s expectation of a renewed covenantal relationship with YHWH has been affirmed. Restoration theology, as discussed in the previous chapter, was not just an alteration in a political reality. It was also supposed to result in a new theological reality wherein Israel would be reunited to YHWH in a covenantal relationship. Jesus is saying that in the shedding of his blood, the moment of Israel’s restoration was coming to fulfillment. Just like the former Passover from Egypt allowed Israel to enter into a covenant with God at Sinai, the Last Supper expected the covenantal relationship to be re-instantiated.655 As Cooke avers: “To a group of Jews gathered together for the paschal dinner that commemorated the Exodus, the words ‘blood of the covenant’ could not but recall the blood that Moses poured upon the altar and sprinkled over the people to signify and effect the divine-human brotherhood of the covenant.”656

Second, the process of renewing the covenant often involved making atonement for the breach in the relationship. If the covenant had been broken by sin, then a means of atonement was essential in order to renew the relationship. I would suggest that when the Last Supper sayings allude to the sacrifice on Sinai, they are not simply stating that the covenant has been renewed, they are also indicating how this state of affairs comes about: the allusion to the sacrifice on Sinai identifies Jesus’ death as a means of atonement to repair the covenant. In short, the allusion “indicates that Jesus’ death” effects a change “in the relationship between God

---

655 LaVerdiere, Dining in the Kingdom, 137.
656 Cooke, “Covenant Sacrifice,” 33.
and his people, Israel.” This fundamental change is the reason why the covenantal relationship with God can be re-forged.

This, however, is not the view of all. Some scholars and theologians, aware that the “blood of the covenant” alludes to Exodus 24:8, deny there is any implicit reference to atonement when it is taken up at the Last Supper. For example, James Alison believes the sacrificial allusion implies the subversion of sacrificial practices altogether, even though there is nothing in the text to support this. Finlan attempts to avoid the overtones of atonement in the Last Supper sayings by asserting that Jesus’ reference to “a new covenant ceremony” would bypass “any appeasing or substitutionary significance” because “the ‘blood’ image is not expiatory but enacts the community-creating function of a covenant sacrifice.” Likewise Koenig, who seems willing to say Jesus offers himself vicariously for others, still does not think that the allusion to Exodus 24:8 portrays Jesus as “a sacrifice for sin.” Following suit, Dowd and Malbon say the allusion simply means that “those whom God had liberated were in covenant relationship with God, not because their sins had been forgiven, but because God had liberated them. Their sins would have to be forgiven … but that was not accomplished by the ‘blood of the covenant.’” Suffice it to say, these examples show that various scholars observe the allusion to the sacrifice on Sinai but do not believe the allusion characterizes Jesus’ death as an atonement.

---

657 Casey, Aramaic Sources, 241.
658 Alison, Being Wrong, 172.
659 Finlan, Options on Atonement, 39. Léon-Dufour, though acknowledging that contemporary Jewish interpretation understood the sacrifice on Sinai as atoning, attempts to recover the original intent of the covenant sacrifice as a sacrifice that brought life in order to downplay the expiatory connotations. See Xavier Léon-Dufour, Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The Witness of the New Testament, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Paulist, 1987), 144-6. It is not apparent to me why emphasizing the life-giving nature of the covenant would require one to avoid expiatory elements like this particular phrase.
660 Koenig, Feast, 40. Koenig even says Jesus is “a ransom to free Israel from all forms of bondage,” so there does not appear to be any theological motive for denying the sacrificial element in the passage.
If the covenant sacrifice of Exodus is understood in light of the cultic practices of the Ancient Near East, the non-atoning view of the allusion at the Last Supper might be correct. Old Testament commentators have given various interpretations of the covenant sacrifice that occurred on Sinai. Many see the blood sprinkled on the people as a symbolic demonstration that covenants establish kinship between the parties involved. In other words, the covenant begets a relationship between two formerly unrelated parties with the effect that they are related, as if by a biological bloodline. Others have suggested that the sprinkling of blood symbolizes the dire consequences of those who break the covenant. In this view, anyone who breaks the covenant would be killed and have their blood shed just like the inaugurating sacrifice. For some authors, more than one interpretation is needed to make sense of the ritual of covenant sacrifice. Unfortunately, Exodus does not interpret the meaning of the blood ritual on Sinai. In the time period in which Exodus was written and edited, the sacrificial rite that inaugurated the covenant did not necessarily involve any overt atoning or expiatory effect, which means there is reason to consider the conclusions of Finlan, Koenig, and Dowd and Malbon.

---


663 Propp, Exodus 19-40, 308-9. In an analogous ritual recorded for us in the documents found at Mari, an animal was slain in order to inaugurate a covenantal agreement without the intention of eating the animal (ARM, II, 37). Here the official refuses unacceptable sacrifices (a dog and a bird) and accepts a donkey instead. If the covenantal rite that we have depicted at Mari can shed light on the ancient ritual depicted on Mt. Sinai, then we cannot simply categorize ancient sacrifice as a “feast with the gods” as Chilton has done since some sacrifices were never eaten in covenantal rites.


665 Childs comments, “…for the Exodus narrative the importance lies with the effect of the rite and not with the theory behind it.” Childs, Exodus, 506.
Nevertheless, this does not conclude the matter. Ideas and interpretations change over time, and such is the case with the Jewish understanding of the sacrifice on Sinai. Because Exodus 24 lacks any kind of interpretive element explaining the importance of the ritual, later Jewish commentators felt the need to clarify the meaning of the ritual, and they did so by explicitly imparting an atoning significance to it. For example, *Targum Onqelos* explicitly gives the sacrifice on Sinai atoning value by inserting the following explanatory phrases in italics into Exodus 24:8: “Whereupon Moses took the blood and sprinkled it *on the altar to atone for the people*, and he said, ‘Here, this is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has established with you in accordance with all these words.’” Likewise, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* follows suit: “Then Moses took *the half of the blood that was in the dashing-basins* and dashed (it) *against the altar to make atonement for the people*; and he said, ‘Behold, this the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’” Both of these Targums have inserted explanatory phrases that explicitly make atonement the chief function of the covenant sacrifice. Thus, even if the ritual of covenant sacrifice was originally void of atoning significance, the diachronic history reveals that the covenant sacrifice eventually took on such connotations. Unfortunately, the current state of Targumic research does not permit us to conclude with absolute confidence that the Targums reflect first century interpretation on their basis alone.

---

668 Dating the Targums has always been a difficult endeavor. Much of what was assumed by previous generations of scholars has undergone revision. In recent studies of Aramaic’s evolution and the intertextual relationships between the Targums, Flesher and Chilton have persuasively argued that Targum Onqelos, at least its earliest form, was composed between 50 and 150 CE. See Paul V. M. Flesher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction* (Waco, Tx.: Baylor University Press, 2011) 155. The earliest version of Targum Onqelos introduced a series of expansions that were later adopted by the other Targums like Pseudo-Jonathan. According to their analyses, Pseudo-Jonathan was completed by 400 CE. (Ibid., 157-9). Based upon the lack of loan words from
However, there is evidence that the understanding of the covenant sacrifice had taken on other connotations by the first century. Philo, though utilizing his trademark allegorical interpretation, describes some kind of purifying effect in the sacrifice on Sinai, even though it does not have an atoning efficacy in his work.\textsuperscript{669} If the covenant blood originally signified a kinship bond or the punishment of breaking the punishment, it no longer had such meaning for Philo, even if he is not entirely in accord with the Targums. Philo at least demonstrates that the historical study of the ritual enacted in Exodus 24 cannot be used to limit its meaning in the first century.

Nevertheless, other evidence does prove that the Targumic interpretation of the atoning covenant sacrifice on Sinai was indeed present in the first century and current within first century Christian communities, the Epistle to the Hebrews.\textsuperscript{670} Hebrews 9:18-20 recounts the sacrifice on Sinai in the following way:

\begin{quote}
Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{669} See Philo, \textit{Her.}, 182-8.
\textsuperscript{670} Allison, \textit{New Moses}, 258-9; Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 3:475. Philo also attributes purifying power to the covenant sacrifice of Exodus 24 as well. Interestingly, Hebrews is the biblical book that Girard, at least originally, believed did support a “sacrificial interpretation” of the cross. Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 224. Since the Gospels possess theology similar to the book of Hebrews, it is my conclusion that the Gospels also possess a “sacrificial interpretation” too.
hyssop and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, “This is the
blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.”

At this point, the author has basically recounted the Sinai sacrifice as recorded in Exodus 24. The author then goes on to make the point—in an almost Targumic type expansion—that the blood poured out on Sinai had an atoning function: “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb. 9:22). For the author of Hebrews, forgiveness and atonement can only be attained through the shedding of blood, and the sacrifice on Sinai attained atonement for Israel to enter into the covenant. A few verses later, his attention turns from Moses’ covenant sacrifice to the sacrifice of the new covenant. The author of Hebrews declares Jesus “has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26b). Not surprisingly, Hebrews possesses one of the strongest affirmations in the New Testament that the new covenant age has begun (Heb. 8:1-13). For the author, the forgiveness of sins promised in the new covenant could only arrive if atonement were first made, which Jesus did on the cross. Thus, even if a person discounts the Targumic evidence as late, Hebrews reveals that the atoning

---


672 There are, however, some differences that suggest conflation with other sacrificial rituals. See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 419.

673 Dunnill writes, “Nonetheless, the covenant-sacrifice, as described here, has been subsumed into the dominant ideology of expiation, as a type of sin-offering, in line with a widespread intertestamental trend already described….” John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 127; cf. 250-1. Hahn, who has a similar conclusion that the death was essential in making atonement, arrives at this conclusion via a different route. Rather than arguing that the Sinai sacrifice was endowed with atoning significance, he takes the sacrifice as a “self-maledictory” ritual that had to be exacted before the covenant could be renewed. See Scott Hahn, “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15-22,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 416-36.

674 A commonly held belief in the first century was that blood sacrifices were necessary for atonement. Such a belief was likely to impose expiatory meanings on to sacrificial rituals that might not have originally had such a meaning. See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* 63 BCE-66CE (London: SCM, 1992), 252.
interpretation of the Sinai sacrifice existed in the first century and that this same interpretation influenced at least one author of the New Testament. 675

Now some might object by citing Moffitt’s recent argument that Hebrews assumes Jesus makes atonement by offering his resurrected life to God rather than dying on the cross. 676 Though he does see the death of Jesus as a necessary component of the process by which Jesus acquires atonement, it seems that his death is only a necessary precondition for Christ’s resurrected life. In his concluding chapter he writes, “The logic of sacrifice in the biblical account is not a logic centered on slaughter, but a logic centered on the presentation of blood/life before God.” 677 He further concludes that “Jesus’ death” was not the effective cause of the atonement but rather “the necessary event that set into motion the sequence that resulted in the offering that effected the full atonement he obtained.” 678 Thus, the event that acquired atonement was not the cross, though it was a necessary precursor, but rather Jesus’ offering of himself as a resurrected high priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

However, for as helpful as Moffitt’s study might be in refocusing attention on the implicit logic of resurrection in Hebrews, it is even more supportive for my argument that it is precisely when the author of Hebrews introduces the covenant sacrifice on Sinai into his more extensive reflection on Yom Kippur, as the author does in Hebrews 9:15-22, that Moffitt is forced to qualify his conclusions and retract the extent to which some of his claims can speak for the entirety of Hebrews. For example, at this juncture he concedes, “… the near context of Heb 9:15

---
675 The date of Hebrews is debated, but usually still placed within the latter portion of the first century. For an argument that it was written before the fall of the Temple, see George A. Barton, “The Date of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” JBL 57, no. 2 (1938): 195-207.
677 Ibid., 299.
678 Ibid; Cf. pages 285-290 of the same work.
presents other challenges to the larger argument of this study.”  At this point, he acknowledges that one can no longer assert that the author of Hebrews always equated blood with Jesus’ resurrected life and not his death on the cross. On the basis of the same passage, one can go even further than Moffitt does here and contend that it is questionable to claim that, in Hebrews, atonement and redemption are only acquired by the offering of Christ’s resurrected life. Hebrews 9:15 indicates Jesus’ death is also an effective cause, though Hebrews as a whole might not make it the only cause, of redemption and atonement: “For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.”  Thus, Moffitt’s study does not undermine but tacitly affirms the argument being made here on the basis of what he cannot claim in light of Hebrews 9:15-22.

I contend that the allusion to the Sinai sacrifice in Mark’s Last Supper saying follows in the exegetical trajectory indicated in the Targums and the book of Hebrews. Finlan, Koenig, and Dowd and Malbon can only dismiss the atoning function of the covenant sacrifice because they anachronistically overlook the exegetical traditions that were current in the first century. Furthermore, in the next section we will see that Matthew—the earliest commentator on Mark, presuming the hypothesis of Markan priority is correct—certainly reads Mark in this particular way. If the evidence is assembled together—the fact that Jewish interpretation of the covenant sacrifice had assimilated atoning efficacy, that Hebrews explicitly locates this interpretation of

---

679 Ibid., 290.
681 Adela Yarbro Collins, “Mark’s Interpretation of the Death of Jesus,” JBL 128, 3 (2009): 550. If the above analysis of the covenant sacrifice is correct, then one is not forced to see two different metaphors present in Mark’s saying over the cup as Collins does: “It seems likely, then, that the saying over the cup in Mark combines two images or metaphors. The death of Jesus is interpreted, on the one hand, as a sacrifice that renews the covenant established on Mount Sinai. On the other, it is a sin offering, a metaphorical sacrifice that expiates the sins of many.” Based upon the evidence we have adduced here, there is really only one metaphor (i.e. covenant sacrifice) that includes the twofold focus of atonement and covenant renewal.
Jesus’ death in the first century, and that Matthew reads Mark in this particular way—we can conclude with a high degree of probability that Mark’s allusion to the covenant sacrifice on Sinai implied Jesus’ death atoned for sin as well.  

At the same time, the phrase “my blood of the covenant” is allusive of other Old Testament texts as well. One prophetic text, Zechariah 9:11, is also likely in the background where YHWH says, “As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant (בְּדַם־בְּרִיתֵךְ) with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.” The NRSV has taken some interpretive liberties here since the first person possessive pronoun suffix “my” is not present in the Hebrew. Nevertheless, the surrounding context is an oracle predicting the arrival of Jerusalem’s humble king and YHWH’s deliverance of Israel from her enemies. This particular verse weds the renewing of the covenant to other dimensions of Israel’s restoration and it does so by introducing the presence of blood, quite possibly the means of renewing the covenant through atonement. When it comes to the allusions present in Mark’s version of the Last Supper, we should not be forced to choose between Zechariah 9:11 and Exodus 24:8, since both are likely in view. In fact, Zechariah 9:11 is likely an allusion to the covenant ceremony on Sinai as well since Jewish interpretation typically connected this oracle to the Exodus. The one thing, however, that makes an allusion to Zechariah 9:11 likely is the fact that the context possesses a

683 However, some commentators have contended that the Hebrew construction allows for the construction found in the NRSV. See Hinckley G. Mitchell, John Merlin Powis Smith, and Julius A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912, 1980), 278.
684 Charlene M. Moss, *The Zechariah Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 151-55. Again, since Matthew follows Mark closely throughout this portion of the Passion, what is true of Matthew is true of his Markan source.
685 Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 139-40. The *Targum of the Minor Prophets* also interpreted Zechariah 9:11 this way: “You also, for whom a covenant was made by blood, I have delivered you from bondage to the Egyptians, I have supplied your needs in a wilderness desolate as an empty pit in which there is no water.” The italics represent the interpretive elements included in the reading of the text. Cited from *The Targum of the Minor Prophets*, trans. Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1989). The reference is clearly back to the original Exodus and would refer to the Sinai covenant as a result.
“redemptive” and “eschatological” thrust that is similar to the Last Supper sayings, which Exodus 24 cannot claim, even though the Greek of Mark 14:24 matches that of Exodus 24:8. In addition, the Isaianic figure of the servant also might be in view, which certainly comes into focus when we look at the later phrases of the cup saying. Though many fail to observe the Servant’s role in establishing the covenant (Isa 42:6; 49:8), it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the covenant-making role of Isaiah’s servant or a similar eschatological expectation is in view. Some have also suggested that the new covenant promises of Jeremiah 31 are present in the covenantal allusions of Mark’s text. The argument for this is based on the following verse where Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new (καινὸν) in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25). Those who argue for an allusion to Jeremiah’s new covenant suggest that the use of “new” (καινὸν) signals the new covenant allusion too. This, however, seems tendentious since the word “new” is never applied to the covenant but to the drinking of wine. Of the allusions present in the covenantal saying, the allusions to Exodus 24:8 and Zechariah 9:11 are the most probable because of the lexical similarity Mark’s saying over the cup has with Exodus 24 and the eschatological similarity shared in conjunction with Zechariah 9.

5.A.3. “Which is Poured out for Many”

The sacrificial language that is present in the phrase “my blood of the covenant” is also present in the latter half of the cup saying where Jesus describes his blood as that “which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). The reference to Jesus’ blood being “poured out (ἐκχυνόμενον)” could allude to several things. It could, for instance, allude to a violent death at the hands of others, which is how the phraseology is utilized in several instances in the Septuagint (Lev. 17:4; Num. 35:33; Deut. 19:10, 21:7, etc.). This is the view of Léon-Dufour who used the point to deny any reference to sacrifice in the Last Supper sayings. However, as we saw earlier, such cultic allusion is already present in the phrase, “my blood of the covenant.”

Thus, if the pouring out of Jesus’ blood simply refers to a violent death, it cannot exclude a sacrificial allusion. In fact, the phrase could be a sacrificial allusion because the language of pouring out blood is used in Leviticus for expiatory sacrifices (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34). Consequently, it is possible that an intentional sacrificial allusion is present. In addition, the “pouring out” could also reflect the language of Isaiah’s suffering servant who “poured out (הֶעֱרָה) himself to death” (Isa. 53:12 MT).

What strengthens the possibility that the Isaianic servant might be in view is the following prepositional phrase, “for many (ὑπὲρ πολλῶν).” Many scholars have concluded that this phrase constitutes an intentional allusion to Isaiah’s final servant song since the Servant bears “the sin of many (πολλῶν)” (Isaiah 53:12LXX). If so,
Jesus has been explicitly cast in the role of Isaiah’s suffering servant who took on the transgressions and iniquities of others, which certainly fits with the interpretation taken above regarding the allusion to the sacrifice on Sinai. At the very least, the preposition ὑπὲρ (“for”) establishes Jesus’ death as an event that will benefit others. The former part of the cup saying has already identified what this benefit will be, namely, a reinstitution of the covenantal relationship with God. Here, it becomes clear that Jesus is willingly and sacrificially offering his life in order to bring others into the restored covenantal relationship with God.

At this juncture, if we take a step back and ask how the words spoken over the bread and the wine make sense within the larger story of Israel, we find a remarkable coherence. The setting of the meal within the context of the Passover recalled Israel’s story of being God’s people whom he liberated from Pharaoh’s oppressive rule in order to enter into covenant with them. That covenant had been broken by subsequent generations who had proven unfaithful. The previous chapter made the case that Jesus’ ministry and proclamation of the kingdom are best understood against the backdrop of Israel’s hopes for restoration, which had yet to dawn for the Jews of the first century. One of these hopes for restoration was the reconstitution of the covenant relationship with God’s people. At the Last Supper, Jesus establishes his death as the


BDAG, 1030. It could in fact imply that Jesus’ death was substitutionary or in the place of the “many.” See also Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 383-89.

Nolland, Matthew, 1080.
means by which the covenant with God is restored. Thus, his death will be the means of atoning for Israel’s transgression of the covenant and commence Israel’s restoration.

All this comes to the fore in Jesus’ last statement of the Last Supper in Mark where he says, “Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25). In light of what Jesus has said in the previous two verses about his death constituting the renewal of the covenant, his resolute expectation that the next great moment would be the arrival of the kingdom means his death would be one of the means by which Israel’s restoration would arrive.696

5.A.4. Integration with the Rest of the Gospel

Though the Last Supper delivers Mark’s most explicit statement on the soteriological implications of Christ’s death, the sayings are of a piece with the larger flow of Mark’s narrative. Mark’s Gospel records several instances where Jesus predicts he would suffer and die. Each prediction builds on the former and provides new insight into the meaning and causes behind his suffering. The first occurs immediately after Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah (Mark 8:29). At this point in time, Jesus “began to teach them that the Son of Man must (δεῖ) undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). The prediction imparts a particular necessity to the future suffering and resurrection with the insertion of the word δεῖ, suggesting that something within the divine will mandates this necessity.697 Other passages in Mark suggest the necessity

---

696 Wright, Victory of God, 561-3; Pitre, End of the Exile, 444-8. There is no need to create a false dichotomy where one is forced to choose between an “eschatological soteriology” where forgiveness is offered with the kingdom’s arrival and a “staurolological soteriology” whereby forgiveness is attained by the expiatory death of Jesus as Schwager does. See Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 111.
comes from the precedent outlined in the Scriptures (Mark 9:12; 14:21, 49). The agents who reject Jesus are clearly identified here as the Jewish leaders. At their behest, Jesus would suffer and die. What is particularly important about this prediction, especially in light of its context, is that it weds Jesus’ future death and suffering with his messianic identity. Peter fails to understand how the messianic role would involve suffering (Mark 8:32), but this is precisely what Jesus embraces. Despite the affirmation of suffering as part of the messianic mission, suffering is not the end state, for the prediction culminates with the resurrection and vindication of the messiah.

The second prediction occurs in the following chapter as Jesus and his disciples are passing through Galilee. On the way, Jesus says, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands (εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων), and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again” (Mark 9:31). The content essentially matches the first prediction, but instead of identifying the instigators as the Jewish leaders like the first prediction, Jesus says he will fall “into human hands.” The phrase does not simply broaden the list of culprits to the Romans, but it also brings Israel’s exilic punishment into view.

In the Septuagint, this expression is used in several ways. In the first way, it is used to signify God handing Israel over to judgment under foreign powers. In Isaiah 19:4, YHWH says, “I will deliver the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master (LXX: εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων); a fierce king will rule over them, says the Sovereign, the Lord of hosts.” The context of exile is also in view later when Isaiah warns the scroll might fall “εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων” when Israel is overwhelmed by her enemies in Isaiah 29:12. A couple of times it is used to refer to an alternate form of punishment and justice than what God would bring. When David has sinned and judgment is imminent, he prefers to fall into God’s hands rather than εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπου
because God has mercy, unlike humans (2 Sam. 24:14; 1 Chron. 21:13). In these passages, it also refers to a form of punishment. Finally, it could also mean given over to executioners, as in Jeremiah’s case where King Zedekiah swears to Jeremiah, “I will not put you to death or hand you over to these men (εἰς χεῖρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων) who seek your life” (Jer. 38:16; LXX 45:16). When it is utilized in Mark, Jesus’ death is already in view, so the utilization of the phrase is unlikely to be a redundant affirmation that Jesus will die. Instead, being betrayed “into human hands” likely signifies Jesus’ sharing in Israel’s exilic punishment when she was turned over to human hands.

If Jesus’ participation in Israel’s exilic suffering is not in view in the second prediction, it certainly comes into focus in the third. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus again says to his disciples, “See we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles (παραδώσουσιν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν); they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again” (Mark 10:33-4). This prediction introduces all of the complicit parties and gives a far more detailed accounting of what will happen at his crucifixion like being mocked, flogged, and spat upon. What is particularly noteworthy is that Jesus says the authorities will “hand him over to the Gentiles.” The notion of being “handed over to the Gentiles” is a theologically significant phrase, which is also allusive of Israel’s exilic punishment. For instance, Psalm 105 speaks of God’s response to Israel’s unfaithfulness by invoking the phrase: “… he gave them into the hand of the nations (בְּיַד גוֹיִם),

698 Sirach 2:18 expresses the same set of alternatives: “Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, but not into the hands of mortals; for equal to his majesty is his mercy, and equal to his name are his works.”
699 In this regard, see also 1 Chron. 21:13.
700 See also Bolt, From a Distance, 53-4.
so that those who hated them ruled over them” (Psalm 106:41; LXX 105:41).

In the same manner, Hosea 8:10 LXX (not MT) also refers to the time of exile as the time when Israel was “παραδοθήσονται ἐν τοῖς ἐθνεσι.” Ezekiel likewise pronounces judgment on Egypt by saying that YHWH “gave it into the hand of the prince of the nations (παρέδωκα αὐτὸν εἰς χεῖρας ἄρχοντος ἐθνῶν)” as a means of punishing them for their arrogance (Ezek. 31:11; cf. 30:23, 26; 31:17).

Even a portion of the phrase, “among the nations/Gentiles,” also referred to Israel’s exilic punishment. The Pentateuch said that the punishment for breaking the covenant was that God would scatter Israel or let Israel perish “among [all] the nations” (Lev. 26:33, 38; Deut. 4:27). The prophetic texts warn that God would “scatter them among the nations” in the imminent exilic punishment (Jer. 9:16). Ezekiel also uses the same language to captures Israel’s exilic state:

And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I disperse them among the nations (ἐν τοῖς ἐθνεσι) and scatter them through the countries. But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, so that they may tell of their abominations among the nations (ἐν τοῖς ἐθνεσι) where they go; then they shall know that I am the Lord (Ezek. 12:15-16 LXX; cf. 4:13; 6:9; 20:23; 22:15).

Lamentations mourns the fact that “Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude; she lives now among the nations (ἐν ἐθνεσι)” (Lam. 1:3a. LXX; cf. 2:9; 4:20). Israel’s cry in exile would later beg God to rescue them “from among the nations (ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν)” (1 Chron. 16:35 LXX). The implication is that when Jesus is said to be handed over to the nations in this final Passion prediction, the text is mapping Jesus onto Israel’s experience under exile. In other words, Jesus’ imminent death by crucifixion will participate in Israel’s exilic punishment, which is important for making sense of how Jesus’ death brings restoration to Israel.

Like the former

---

701 The LXX has the following: “παρέδωκαν αὐτοὺς εἰς χεῖρας ἐχθρῶν.”
702 Bolt, From a Distance, 56-8.
prediction, this one too anticipates Jesus’ resurrection. In short, the prediction shows that what is about to happen to Jesus in his death and resurrection is a microcosm of Israel’s experience of exile and restoration. As the Messiah, his suffering will participate in Israel’s exilic punishment.

This final prediction, however, is immediately followed by a pericope in which Jesus explicitly imparts soteriological significance to his death. The scene shifts to James and John imploring Jesus for the privilege of sitting on his left and right in the kingdom. Jesus incredulously responds: “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38). It is interesting that the passage uses both drinking the cup and baptism as symbols of Christ’s imminent death. The reference to the cup is significant in light of its appearance at the Last Supper and later in the Garden of Gethsemane. One might expect the Eucharistic cup to refer to Christ’s death, but probably not his baptism. Nevertheless, the connection is here, which means that Jesus’ Spirit-empowered mission inaugurated at the baptism, reaches its telos in the crucifixion.

The other disciples are enraged over James and John’s audacious request. Instead of scolding only James and John, Jesus reveals that even the disciples who took offense at James and John’s request were still operating with values antithetical to the kingdom. In response, Jesus reveals that the Kingdom of God functions differently. The greatest person is not the one who lords his greatness over another, but the one who is the “slave of all” (Mark 10:44). Then, to drive the point home, Jesus explains how he, the greatest in the kingdom, will serve others: “For the Son of Many came not to be served but to serve (διακονῆσαι), and to give his life a ransom (λύτρον) for many” (Mark 10:45). With this statement, Mark moves beyond simply describing events about to transpire and again identifies the soteriological significance that Jesus’
death will have. This statement reveals that Jesus’ death is not simply necessitated by Scriptural precedent. His death will accomplish something significant for redemption because it will be a λύτρον.

What does it mean for Jesus to be a λύτρον? In the common Greek usage, a ransom was a payment made to procure the release or protection of something else. Though some commentators point to the cultic requirements of ancient Israel as the appropriate background for understanding the term, the legal texts of the Old Testament law codes also use λύτρον to refer to payments made in exchange for one’s own life. It could draw its meaning from either the cultic or economic spheres, but both affirm the same notion that Jesus’ death would be some form of exchange that liberates and saves the many.

Mark’s ransom saying does bear several affinities with Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and quite likely draws upon the typology of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. In Isaiah 53:11 LXX the servant is “the just one who serves many well (δίκαιον εὖ δουλεύοντα πολλοῖς),” which possesses the same the thrust as the ransom sayings’ “to serve,” though different words are

---

703 For some, this passage is the early church writing its theology back into the Gospel texts. Against this, one can make the case that there is only one instance in the New Testament of Jesus being called an “ἀντίλυτρον” in 1 Tim. 2:6. This is still different from the use of the saying in Mark: “δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν”. As such, it is difficult to argue that it is a creation of the early church based upon wording alone. See Witherington, Christology, 253.

704 In literature outside the New Testament, it was often used to refer to the payment offered for the freedom of slaves (BDAG, 605). Josephus talks about Eleazar the priest giving an expensive gold beam to the pillaging Crassus to protect the other temple artifacts. Josephus says, “… he gave this beam of gold as a ransom (λύτρον) for the whole (ἀντὶ πάντων)” (Josephus, Ant., 14.107, trans. Whiston). For an enlightening analysis on how the ransom saying would have been received in the first centuries of the Christian era based upon inscription evidence, see Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Significance of Mark 10:45 among Gentile Christians,” HTR 90, no. 4 (1997): 371-82. Some of the inscriptions reveal that devotees gave ransoms in order to be remitted of their known and unknown sins, which seems quite applicable to the current passage.


706 The most persuasive essay on this is Rikki E. Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45,” in Jesus and the Suffering Servant, 125-51. Witherington, though, makes a case for the influence of Isaiah 43 and God’s giving of a “ransom” for his servant. See Ben Witherington III, The Christology of Jesus (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 254.
employed.\textsuperscript{707} This lexical difference is not enough to destroy the connection since Mark utilizes both διακονέω and δουλεύω synonymously in the previous verses.\textsuperscript{708} In addition, both Jesus and Isaiah’s servant benefit the “many.”\textsuperscript{709} Though I think an allusion to Isaiah’s final servant song seems likely, the theological implications are present even if such an allusion is not. To put it briefly, the passage affirms that the death of Jesus is bound up with his larger purpose to bring salvation to Israel and ultimately the dawning of God’s kingdom. His death is not at variance with his life and ministry but of one piece with it since it was for this that he “came.” In addition, his death would be an exchange or a purchase that would secure the salvation of others.

Even though the ransom saying is important and confirms that Jesus’ death coheres with his more encompassing mission of redeeming Israel, the passage is soteriologically ambiguous by itself. A ransom simply speaks of release, and this release can be accomplished in various ways. In fact, most atonement theories can speak of Jesus’ death being a “ransom” in some way.\textsuperscript{710} Without providing a thorough theological explanation for how Jesus’ death will be salvific, the ransom saying continues a growing soteriological motif that reaches its fullest articulation in the Last Supper. In fact, Mark actually connects the ransom saying to the Last Supper sayings through his use of “many” (Mark 10:45). These are the same beneficiaries that

\begin{itemize}
  \item Marcus argues that the allusion here is to Daniel’s son of man in Dan. 7:13-14. He says that Jesus is intentionally reversing an expectation that believed the coming one would be served by all. Seeing Jesus’ “service” as an allusion to the Danielic son of man seems like a bit of a stretch, but Marcus is able to show several parallels between Daniel 7 and Mark 10 that make the allusion possible. See Marcus, Mark 8-16, 749, 753. Even so, he does not think the influence of Daniel 7 displaces the influence of Isaiah other scholars detect.
  \item Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 121.
  \item Isaiah 53:11 speaks of the servant making “many righteous.” In the ransom saying of Mark, the Son of Man’s ransom is “for many.” As a result, several scholars believe Mark’s use of “many” is allusive of Isaiah’s servant. On this, see France, Mark, 419-21; Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20, 122. However, this is contested in Dunn, Jesus Remembered, 812-5. Though I appreciate Dunn’s caution, he completely overlooks the context of service that pervades the verses surrounding Mark 10:45, which make an allusion to Isaiah 53 more probable than he ascertains.
  \item Regarding this verse, scholars come to vastly different conclusions about the theology of atonement it represents. Witherington, for instance, avers the verse expresses a substitutionary view of the atonement (Witherington, Mark, 290). Others say it represents the Christus Victor theory of atonement. E.g. Dowd and Malbon, “Jesus’ Death in Mark,” 283-5. Hamerton-Kelly believes it speaks to the scapegoat mechanism in Girardian thought. See Hamerton-Kelly, Gospel of the Sacred, 71. In my opinion, the issue cannot be settled on the basis of this verse alone.
\end{itemize}
are identified at the Last Supper when Jesus says, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). This intratextual link means that the two statements are inherently connected and the ransom saying points to the fuller theological articulation found at the Last Supper. In other words, Jesus is the ransom because he is the covenant-inaugurating sacrifice that atones for the sins of the many.

After the Last Supper, the rest of Mark continues to affirm and develop the saving significance of the cross. The pericope that immediately follows the Last Supper account has some significant theological implications. After the meal, Jesus and the disciples sing a hymn and go to the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:26). At this point, Jesus tells his disciples “You will all become deserters; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered’” (Mark 14:27). In the text, Jesus quotes from Zechariah 13:7, which he analogously applies to himself and his disciples. The quotation, however, alters the text of Zechariah in one particular way. In the MT and LXX texts of Zechariah 13:7, both attribute the striking to a “sword,” not to a particular person. In Jesus’ rendition, the subject of the sentence that performs the striking has changed from the impersonal sword to the “I,” who can be none other than God himself. The implications are important theologically. The events that are about to transpire are not simply the vagaries of fate or solely the ire of Rome falling upon Jesus. Somehow in the midst of all the various parties seeking to annihilate Jesus is the hand of God. Gibbs summarizes the theological significance well: “What Jesus now goes to experience is the hand of God, the Father’s own...”

---

711 Chilton, Feast of Meanings, 118-9. The prepositions are different in each case. Mark 10:45 has “ἀντὶ πολλῶν” whereas Mark 14:25 has “ὑπὲρ πολλῶν.” Though Combrink admits there is no explicit connection in the text, he says “it is difficult to deny an indirect influence of Isa 53,” not to mention the fact that even scholars like Hooker concede Second Isaiah has deeply influenced the saying. See Combrink, “Salvation in Mark,” 53.

712 Since there are no textual traditions that support this reading of the verse, the switch from the sword to the first person singular appears to be an interpretive move that finds its roots either in Jesus or the early Christian community. See Martinus J. J. Menken, “Striking the Shepherd: Early Christian Versions and Interpretations of Zechariah 13,7,” Bib 92, no. 1 (2011): 44-9. Wright suggests that this quotation came from Jesus. See N. T. Wright, “The Reasons for Jesus’ Crucifixion,” in Stricken by God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ, ed. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 137.
hand, smiting him.” Though many theologians might shrink in horror from such a thought, the intentional alteration of Zechariah 13:7 mandates such an association. Theologically speaking, it mandates that a theology of the cross that seeks to follow the Gospels cannot remove God from the picture as if it were simply the result of human evil turning its venom upon Jesus as Girardian views of the atonement do. God, in one way or another, is involved in the process of striking the shepherd too.

The following pericope has Jesus and the disciples entering the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. In anguish, Jesus pleads, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14:36). Several important things appear in this prayer. First, it is a reaffirmation that what is about to transpire in the crucifixion is a part of God’s will. Second, Jesus calls what is about to happen to him the “cup.” Intratextually, this alludes back to the previous references to the Eucharistic cup (Mark 14:23) and the discourse with James and John regarding whether they were willing to drink the cup like Jesus would (Mark 10:38). If it is the Father’s will, Jesus is willing to drink the cup of suffering. Speaking of the “cup” might also bear other connotations as well. In the prophetic texts, the imagery of the “cup” is often tied to God’s judgment on evil (Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15-7; 49:12; 51:7; Ezek. 23:31-3; Hab. 2:16; Zech. 12:2). It is not entirely clear in the context of Mark whether this connotation is present, but the fact that the Passion predictions ostensibly referred to Israel’s exilic punishment makes it quite possible that being willing to drink the “cup” is another reference to Jesus taking on Israel’s exilic punishment.

---

714 While the text of Mark 7:4 is contested, it would appear that there might be a polemic against the Pharisees who are concerned with “baptizing” their cups. The preoccupation with purity rituals fails to strike at the heart of the issue, which Jesus faces in drinking the cup.
715 Gibbs, “Father’s Wrath,” 221.
The atoning significance of Jesus’ cross is carried deep into the Passion narrative. For Mark, Jesus’ identity is inherently tied to the cross. Throughout the whole book, the human characters have failed to grasp the fullness of Jesus’ identity. Even Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah in Caesarea, though accurate, is incomplete because Peter fails to understand how Jesus’ messianic role involves suffering (Mark 8:27-33). However, characters on the periphery, like the demoniacs, have had an uncanny awareness of Jesus’ identity that pierce through the obfuscation and truly understand him. For Mark, the most important breakthrough occurs in the ominous crucifixion scene. During the crucifixion, darkness covers the region, and Jesus cries out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). The dying Galilean musters one last breath and expires. For many of the observers, this was the end of a charlatan’s bid to be the Messiah. However, a centurion who “stood facing” Jesus on the cross sees just the opposite and proclaims: “Truly this man was God’s Son” (Mark 15:39). Though a simple sentence, the sentence speaks volumes into the horrifying din of the crucifixion. Other human actors in the Gospel—even the disciples in certain ways—have been blinded and thus not able to “see,” but the centurion “saw” Jesus’ true identity.\(^716\) The centurion’s lucid understanding of Jesus has shattered the confusion over Jesus’ identity that has plagued most of the characters in Mark’s narrative. Through the centurion’s proclamation, Mark weds Jesus’ identity to the crucifixion. Only when gazing at the cross, like the centurion, can one truly understand Jesus’ identity and mission.\(^717\) Moreover, we should not miss the fact that a centurion makes this proclamation. As a Gentile, he would have been viewed as one foreign to Israel’s covenantal promises. However, his insight into Jesus’ identity reveals that receiving the salvation offered by Jesus is not limited

\(^716\) Brian K. Gamel, “Salvation in a Sentence: Mark 15:39 as Markan Soteriology,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6, no. 1 (2012): 71-3. The “seeing” of the centurion contrasts with the blinding effects the parables were to induce: “They may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand…” (Mark 4:12).

\(^717\) Carroll and Green, *Death of Jesus*, 29.
to the Jewish people, but has taken on the universal thrust of Isaiah’s hopes for restoration. The Gentiles were identifying the presence of Israel’s God active in Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet, the scene with the centurion gazing at the cross possesses another theologically significant observation. When Jesus breathes his last upon the cross, Mark observes that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Mark 15:38). The statement jars the reader from the somber scene at Golgotha and transports her to an entirely different geographical location: the Jerusalem temple. Despite being a different location, the author sees the separate events constitutive of a single story that reaches its climax at this crucial moment. For Mark, the indictment against the temple that Jesus had pronounced with the action in the temple has come full circle. The temple’s destruction has begun with the rending of the temple curtain. More significantly, Mark wants his readers to realize the way to God is no longer through the temple and its cult, but now through the death of Jesus Christ. To be sure, the Last Supper sayings have prepared the reader for this point because they explain that Jesus’ death on the cross “as a cultic sacrifice” functions as a replacement for the temple itself. As one author put it so well: “Mark would have us know our Lord’s entire ministry is a passion story, whereby he tears open the curtain of separation between God and man, and ensuring an everlasting Yom Kippur, that is, a Day of Atonement.” The sacrificial death of Jesus has made access to God available to all, even the Gentile centurion.

---

718 Gamel, “Salvation in a Sentence,” 76.
719 There were two curtains in the Temple at this time (Josephus, War, 5.214, 219), but Mark does not tell us which curtain he means here. Theologically, it probably does not matter. The verb σχίζω was used earlier in the Gospel at Jesus’ baptism to symbolize the divine epiphany, and probably bears a similar connotation of God revealing himself here.
720 France, Mark, 657.
721 If we take the Temple action and the Last Supper as mutually explicatory events, as some scholars do, then we can conclude that Jesus and his death replace the Temple cult. See Wright, Victory of God, 558; Daniel J. Antwi, “Did Jesus Consider His Death to be an Atoning Sacrifice?” Int 45, no. 1 (1991): 17-28.
722 Kilmartin, Eucharist, 55.
This much reveals that the theological implications of the Last Supper sayings are not alien pieces of ideology that Mark has assimilated from the tradition, but fully integrated into his portrait of Jesus and the cross. Jesus, whose body was broken and whose blood was spilled out in the crucifixion, becomes the means by which human beings can be relationally connected with God. The rending of the veil establishes Jesus’ death as the foundation upon which sinful humans can re-enter into a covenantal relationship with God. In his death, the hopes for Israel’s restoration from exile were coming true. The covenant has been remade and the Gentiles were turning to God. It is thus entirely understandable why Jesus dies anticipating his next meal to be with his disciples in the kingdom. Israel’s restoration was coming to pass.

5.B. Matthew

5.B.1. The Last Supper in Matthew

As we transition from Mark to Matthew, the analysis of Mark will rarely be far from view given the strong likelihood that Matthew and Luke used Mark to write their Gospels. Matthew’s dependence upon Mark is quite apparent in his narration of the Last Supper account because, with a few notable exceptions, Matthew’s account of the Last Supper follows Mark rather closely. Since Matthew has assimilated many of the theological emphases that were present in Mark, the discussion on Matthew will not seek to repeat what has been said before in the section on Mark. It should be assumed that much of what is true regarding Mark applies to Matthew as well. In order to avoid the reduplication of material that does not significantly reveal Matthew’s theological perspective, this section will primarily concentrate on the pieces that are unique to Matthew instead of including the material previously analyzed in Mark.

---

724 A complete summary of the redactions can be found in Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:456, 459-60, 465.
Matthew has introduced minor changes and alterations to Mark’s account of the Last Supper that reveal the theological points Matthew desires to make, though not all of Matthew’s changes significantly alter the story. For example, though Matthew identifies the day of the Last Supper as the “first day of Unleavened Bread” he drops Mark’s identification that this was “when the Passover lamb is sacrificed” (Mark 14:12; cf. Matt. 26:17). Nevertheless, this does not delete the Passover setting because Matthew still has the disciples directly ask Jesus “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?” (Matt. 26:17). This alteration adds or subtracts nothing to the overall account of the Last Supper because the meal is ultimately still set within the context of the Passover.

However, several of Matthew’s emendations do have theological significance for his Last Supper account. When Matthew records Jesus’ charge to the disciples to prepare the Passover, Matthew no longer specifies that two disciples went as Mark does, and he adds a phrase that is absent in Mark. Jesus instructs the disciples preparing the Last Supper to inform their anonymous host that their teacher has announced: “My time is near (Ὁ καιρός μου ἐγγύς ἐστιν)” (Matt. 26:18). By adding this phrase, Matthew ties Jesus’ message of the kingdom’s imminent arrival with the events he is about to symbolize in the Last Supper. Throughout the Gospel, there have been many allusions to the coming “time (καιρός)”⁷²⁵ In Matthew 8:29, the Gadarene Demoniacs question Jesus: “Have you come here to torment us before the time (καιροῦ)?” In the exorcism of the demoniacs, the reference to the καιρός refers to the future restoration and judgment upon evil. In the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the kingdom of heaven is likened to the eschatological “harvest time (ἐν καιρῷ τοῦ θερισμοῦ)” (Matt.13:30) when judgment will be meted out against the weeds when they are separated from the good grain and

---

⁷²⁵ Sometimes it is simply a marker for what is happening at a given point in time and does not have any connotation of eschatological fulfillment (Matt. 11:25; 12:1; 14:1; 24:45).
burned. When the Pharisees and Sadducees fail to understand the eschatological significance of the recent events, Jesus faults them for failing to “interpret the signs of the times (τῶν καιρῶν)” (Matt. 16:3), which again has eschatological overtones. In the parable of the wicked tenants, the owner sends servants to collect fruit when “the harvest time (ὁ καιρὸς τῶν καρπῶν) had come” (Matt. 21:34) and the audience says the owner will lease it to others to “give him the produce at the harvest time (τοὺς καρποὺς ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς αὐτῶν)” (Matt. 21:41). Throughout Matthew, καιρός often signifies the coming eschatological harvest and judgment. By inserting the comment that his καιρός was near, Matthew suggests that Jesus’ death, which would be symbolized in Last Supper, would precipitate the arrival of the kingdom. Through the introduction of this phrase, Matthew has emphasized that Jesus’ death will be the means by which the kingdom will arrive, even more so than Mark.

Comparison of Institutions Narratives in Mark and Matthew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark 14:22-24</th>
<th>Matt 26:26-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bread Saying:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bread Saying:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ἅρτον εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπεν, λάβετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου.</td>
<td>ἐσθιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν λαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἅρτον καὶ εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ δοῦσα τοῖς μαθηταῖς εἶπεν, λάβετε φάγετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cup Saying:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cup Saying:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔπινεν ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμα μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ ἐκχυνόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν.</td>
<td>καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες. τούτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμα μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυνόμενον εἰς ἀφέσιν ἀμαρτιῶν.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

726 Donald Senior, The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1985), 59-61, 182. Jesus’ main message was that “the kingdom of heaven has come near (ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν)” (Matt. 3:2, 4:17; 10:7). In saying his καιρός was ἐγγὺς, Jesus was situating the events that were about to happen to him within the larger eschatological program of the kingdom that he had announced.

727 In the chart, the words unique to each account have been underlined in order to show the changes that Matthew has introduced.
When we come to the sayings over the bread and the cup, Matthew has made several changes, which can be seen in the above chart. Some of these are simply the introduction or alterations of conjunctions (insertions of καὶ or an alteration of καὶ to δὲ), which do little to change the force of the sayings. In the bread saying, Matthew introduces more specificity than what one finds in Mark’s account. He clarifies that Jesus is the one who is breaking the bread and identifies the disciples as the recipients of the bread rather than using the pronoun, αὐτοῖς.

Probably the most significant alteration that Matthew makes to the bread saying is his introduction of the imperative φάγετε, which mirrors his later introduction of the imperative πίετε in the cup saying. In contrast, Mark leaves one to assume that they ate the bread and simply states “all of them drank” from the cup (Mark 14:23). Matthew’s insertions of the imperatives, which were absent in Mark’s account, likely reflect the framing of the passage for liturgical use wherein explicit commands would verbally instruct the people to partake of the Eucharistic elements. If such a conclusion correctly explains why the imperatives were added, it does suggest that liturgical use would introduce minor changes to accommodate Eucharistic practice, but not enough to alter the meaning significantly.

Matthew’s other significant additions come in the cup saying. Though Matthew follows Mark much of the way, he has introduced two significant changes in the cup saying. First, when Matthew records Jesus saying “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” he changes Mark’s ὑπὲρ to περὶ (Matt. 26:28). The significance of this change is difficult to determine, but it has been argued that the change was intentionally adopted to bring the prepositional phrase into closer parallel with Isaiah’s suffering servant. In the discussion on Mark, we noted that Mark’s ὑπὲρ πολλῶν was likely an allusion to Isaiah’s suffering servant who

---

728 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:472.
729 Kodell, Eucharist, 101; Senior, Gospel of Matthew, 67-8. The translation of Isa. 53:4 is from the LXX not the MT.
made “many” righteous. If such is the case with Mark, it is possible that Matthew’s alteration of the prepositional phrase to περὶ πολλῶν was to make the connection with Isaiah’s suffering servant even more apparent. This is the same preposition that the Septuagint used to identify those who benefited from the servant’s death in Isaiah 53:4: “He suffers for (περὶ) us.” If so, Matthew has brought the “for many” formula into greater conformity with Isaiah’s suffering servant and makes such an allusion more probable.

The most important difference in Matthew’s saying over the cup is his addition at the end to the effect that the pouring out of Jesus’ blood of the covenant would be “for the forgiveness of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν).” I argued earlier that Mark’s saying over the cup alluded to the covenant sacrifice on Sinai in Exodus 24:8 and that this sacrifice was understood to effect atonement for sin, even if Mark does not say this explicitly. By adopting Mark’s wording in the cup saying, Matthew likewise alludes to Exodus 24:8. When Matthew describes the “blood of the covenant” as that which is “for the forgiveness of sins” he verifies that the allusion to Moses’ sacrifice on Sinai—which is present in both Mark and Matthew—possessed atoning significance.730 Nathan Eubank is on the right track when he says, “… the Last Supper further nuances Matthew’s portrait of Jesus as the one who pays the ransom-price for those in exile.”731 Thus, even if Mark’s allusion to the covenant sacrifice on Sinai fails to make the atoning function explicit, Matthew’s account of the Last Supper certainly does and indicates that Mark’s account should be read in a similar fashion.

Some have argued that Matthew’s allusion to the “forgiveness of sins” has shifted the intertextual allusion away from Exodus 24:8 and Zechariah 9:11 and directed it toward the new

---

730 Moloney, *Body Broken*, 79. As Moloney has pointed out in his literary reading of the Last Supper in light of their respective narratives, the offer of forgiveness is significant for a group of disciples that have failed to be faithful to their master either through betrayal, denial, or fear.

731 Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 177.
covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-4. This is indeed possible since Jeremiah’s new covenant expected the forgiveness of Israel’s sins. However, we are not forced to turn to Jeremiah’s new covenant prophecy to explain his addition of the phrase “forgiveness of sins” to the Last Supper account. Scholars have noted that the same phrase is present in Mark 1:4 where John the Baptist is introduced “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν).” However, Matthew’s description of John’s baptism has omitted this very phrase from the parallel account in his Gospel (Matt. 3:1-6). According to Marshall, “… it looks as though Matthew has withheld the phrase in the story of John and kept it for use here.” If Marshall is right and Matthew has deliberately held the phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” in abeyance, then he has done so in order to make this the exclusive accomplishment of the cross. Consequently, Matthew’s redactional relocation of this phrase removes a potential soteriological ambiguity for someone reading Mark in order to make sure the readers of Matthew understand the cross constitutes the moment when the forgiveness of sins was attained. If Matthew has

---

732 For example, Clay Ham has argued that Matthew’s addition of “forgiveness of sins” makes Jeremiah 31:31-4 the primary text being alluded to by the covenantal language of the Last Supper, though he does not rule out the influence of Exod. 24:8 and Zechariah 9:11. For support, he cites the fact that Jesus does not sprinkle blood on his disciples as Moses did in Exodus 24 nor does he renew the Mosaic covenant. Ham observes that Matthew has adopted the wording of Exodus 24:8, but has done so in a “typological” fashion in order to present a new idea. Ham is certainly right to see that Jesus has not blindly redone an earlier ritual like Moses had done, but it is questionable whether this means the influence of Zechariah or Exodus is thereby lessened. If, as I argue above, Jewish and Christian exegesis of the Sinai covenant sacrifice saw it as atoning, then the addition of “forgiveness of sins” does not displace Exodus 24:8, but remains integral to it, even if it does introduce the influence of Jeremiah 31. See Clay Ham, “The Last Supper in Matthew,” BBR 10, no. 1 (2000): 59-66. Cf. Marshall, Last Supper, 100.

733 He has also turned Mark’s descriptive language into reported speech: “In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’” (Matt. 3:1-2).


735 It was also Matthew’s unique insertion of the phrase “forgiveness of sins” into the Last Supper sayings that led Heider to categorize Matthew’s view of the atonement as “a vicarious sacrifice,” which would pave the way for Anselm’s theory of the atonement. George C. Heider, “Atonement and the Gospels,” Journal of Theological Interpretation 2 no. 2 (2008): 266. He argues that the thought world of the Last Supper is that of Yom Kippur even though it is couched in language of a Passover seder (Ibid., 265). His assertion is not defended nearly enough to prove the association with Yom Kippur, though. Others have argued that Matthew’s relocation of the phrase is more indicative of his thoughts on baptism rather than his soteriology. See Petri Luomanen, Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew’s View of Salvation (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 220-21. However, it seems more likely that the relocation is a reflection of both Matthew’s soteriology and his theology of baptism rather than one in exclusion of the other.
relocated the phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” from its location in his Markan source and if
the covenant sacrifice on Sinai did effect atonement as I have argued previously, all the pieces
are in place for Matthew to affirm the atoning significance of Jesus’ death as a covenant sacrifice
without relying upon Jeremiah 31:31-4. While Jeremiah 31:31-4 may still be in view, it would
be misguided to suppress the importance of Exodus 24:8 and Zechariah 9:11 since the actual
Greek wording, as in Mark’s account, mirrors Exodus 24:8 and Matthew’s emendations have
been heightened the eschatological hopes, resonating with Zechariah 9.

5.B.2. Integration

Matthew’s account of the Last Supper, though adapted from Mark’s account, still
cohertently fits within the larger narrative of Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew’s Gospel began with
the genealogy that divided Israel’s history into periods of fourteen generations. The last era had
begun with the deportation to Babylon and ended with the coming of the Messiah. Jesus, as the
Messiah, would bring an end to Israel’s exilic punishment. It is likely this notion of exile as
punishment for sin that the narrator had in view when he introduced the significance of Jesus’
name. In the opening chapter, when Jesus’ coming is first announced to Joseph, an angel
instructs Joseph to name Mary’s son “Jesus,” which means “YHWH saves” because “he will
save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). The very beginning of the Gospel established
Israel’s larger story of exile and restoration as the backdrop for Jesus’ particular story. The exile,
after all, was a punishment for sin and stating that Jesus would save his people from their sins
indicates that Jesus would redeem his people from their exilic punishment. Because Matthew
has drawn the reader’s attention to the meaning of Jesus’ name and specifically attached it to

736 Luomanen, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 222-4. Luomanen persuasively argues against Jeremiah’s new
covenant being present since Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes the continued need for teaching and seeks to show
faithfulness to Torah instead of a decisive break.
saving “his people from their sins,” it is significant that Matthew uses Jesus’ proper name more frequently in the Passion accounts than the other Gospels, introducing it in places where Mark uses the third person pronoun.\textsuperscript{737} More likely than not, Matthew is intentionally invoking the name’s meaning and identifying the cross as the event that saves God’s people from their sin.

Like Mark, Matthew has a series of Passion predictions, which have prepared the reader for the comments delivered at the Last Supper and the events that follow it. Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah in Caesarea Philippi is followed by the first of these Passion predictions (Matt. 16:21-3), which make the cross and resurrection constitutive of Jesus’ messianic mission. The second prediction follows Mark’s emphasis of falling “into human hands,” which again echoes Israel’s punishment of exile (Matt. 17:22). The final prediction again speaks of Jesus being handed “over to the Gentiles” (Matt. 20:18). Like Mark’s account, this final prediction also culminates with the ransom saying, which says “… the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).\textsuperscript{738} In discussing the ransom saying in the context of Mark, it was noted that financial analogies might better explain the term “ransom” than cultic imagery. Such certainly seems to be the case in Matthew because he uses the metaphor of sin as debt in both the Lord’s prayer (Matt. 6:12) and the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 6:23-35).\textsuperscript{739} Given his predilection for understanding sin as debt

\textsuperscript{737} Carroll and Green, \textit{Death of Jesus}, 50; Donald P. Senior, \textit{The Passion Narrative According to Matthew: A Redactional Study} (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1982), 25, n. 5. Senior suggests this is simply a result of Matthew’s tendency to elucidate the characters and subjects that Mark leaves ambiguous. However, the clustering of “Jesus” in Matthew 26-27 is quite pronounced when compared with Mark: Matt. 26:1, 4, 6, 17, 19, 26, 36, 49, 50, 51, 63, 71; 27:1, 11, 17, 20, 22, 27, 37, 55, 57. Several instances reveal a concerted effort to introduce the name “Jesus” even when Mark does not employ a third person pronoun: E.g. Matt. 27:1, 11, 17, 20, 22, 37, 55.

\textsuperscript{738} Luomanen, \textit{Kingdom of Heaven}, 230. Because Matthew follows Mark by including the ransom saying, Luomanen errs in saying “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.” There is no reason why one should be forced to choose between Jesus as an example and Jesus’ death as an atonement for his followers. Such an antithesis betrays a modern theological construct that supposes exemplary views and substitutionary views of the atonement are incommensurable.

\textsuperscript{739} There is some question whether the petition to “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12) is to be taken metaphorically or literally, the most likely interpretation is the metaphorical one.
elsewhere in his Gospel, Matthew’s use of the ransom saying likely casts Jesus’ death as a form of economic transaction. To put it more precisely, as a ransom, Jesus’ death would pay the sin debt of others.

Matthew, as noted in the preceding chapter, has also made a typological connection between Jesus and Moses throughout the book. This typological comparison continues into the Last Supper scene as well. There are little emendations in the account of the Last Supper, which might be intentional echoes of Moses’ preparation of the Passover in Exodus. Davies and Allison suggest that the narrator’s description of the disciples’ preparation of the Passover (“the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal”) in Matthew 26:19 mirrors the Israelites’ preparation of the Passover in Exodus 12:28. This might not be convincing to all, but one is certainly on firm ground to aver that Jesus’ death as the inauguration of the covenant parallels and even surpasses the role of Moses who was the mediator of Israel’s covenant with YHWH at Sinai. Thus, the Last Supper, which draws on the trope of Jesus as the New Moses, adds another dimension to the manifold ways in which Jesus’ ministry parallels Moses in the Gospel of Matthew.


For a brilliant articulation of how Matthew’s ransom saying connects with the notion of captivity and exile, see Eubank, Wages of Cross-Bearing, esp. 148-68. See the following studies by Gary Anderson that show how the metaphors for sin evolve during the early Second Temple period and trace the emergence of the metaphor for sin as debt. Gary A. Anderson, Sin: A History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); idem, “From Israel’s Burden To Israel’s Debt: Towards A Theology Of Sin In Biblical And Early Second Temple Sources,” in Reworking the Bible, ed. Devorah Dimant, Ruth Clements, and Esther G. Chazon (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1-30.

Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:458.

Cooke, “Covenant Sacrifice,” 33; Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:473. As we noted in the former chapter, Matthew is invested in casting Jesus as a New Moses figure. The same applies here to the Last Supper sayings of Jesus where the parallels are hard to miss. Davies and Allison write, “There is a typological relationship between the act of Moses and the act of Jesus, a relationship consistent with and reinforced by the Moses typology present elsewhere. As the first redeemer made a sacrifice for the people so that they might enter into a new covenant with God, so does the last redeemer inaugurate another covenant by offering his blood, that is, his life, for the forgiveness of sins.”
After the Last Supper, Matthew shares many of the episodes following the Last Supper that were discussed in Mark. For example, Matthew has Jesus quoting from Zechariah 13:7 to predict that his followers will soon desert him (Matt. 26:31-5). Matthew also includes Jesus praying in the garden, asking the Father if the cup could be bypassed, but consents if it is the Father’s will. The heart and essence of this prayer, though not differing substantially from Mark’s account, corresponds to the Lord’s prayer given earlier in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:9-13).\footnote{Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:497. The links include the similar address to the “Father,” the desire for God’s will to be done, and the desire to not enter into temptation.} Jesus’ prayer in the garden mirrors precisely the way he had taught his disciples to pray. Because the cup of suffering is the Father’s will, he consents to drinking the cup just as he does in Mark.

When it comes to the crucifixion scene, Matthew also includes the rending of the temple curtain, but he adds several important elements. Immediately after the curtain is rent, the narrator comments, “The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matt. 27:51b-53). The other Gospels fail to include this portion, but Matthew has inserted it to emphasize that, in Jesus’ death and resurrection, Israel’s restoration has begun.\footnote{Senior, Gospel of Matthew, 166-7.} The scene likely recalls Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones (Ezek. 37:1-14) coming back to life, a point which is underscored by some of the lexical connections between the passages.\footnote{Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:633-5.} For example, Matthew speaks of the earth being moved, “ἐσείσθη” (Matt. 27:51), and the LXX text of Ezekiel speaks of a σεισμὸς, an earthquake, occurring when Ezekiel was prophesying (Ezek. 37:7). Additionally, Matthew mentions the opening of the tombs “μνημεῖα” (Matt. 27:52-3) and the interpretation of Ezekiel’s
vision includes the promise that God would open up and bring Israel out of their tombs, “μνήματα” (Ezek. 37:12). In Ezekiel’s vision, the resurrection of the desiccated skeletons was a metaphor for God’s future restoration of Israel. Here, the imagery has been profoundly altered. What was metaphorical (i.e. resurrection) has become a literal experience according to Matthew. The literal occurrence of resurrection affirms that Israel’s restoration has begun in and through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

To conclude, the Gospel of Matthew has emphasized the forgiveness of sins and identified Jesus’ death on the cross as the means by which Jesus would bring in the kingdom of God and Israel’s restoration. Matthew, even more so than Mark, has explicitly established Jesus’ death as an atonement for sin, which is most apparent in his addition of the phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” in the Last Supper sayings.746 However, affirming that Matthew’s emphasis falls on the forgiveness of sins does not mean this is the only dimension to salvation in Matthew.747 As we saw in the previous chapter, the arrival of the kingdom brought healing and restoration to the people to whom Jesus ministered. When Matthew identifies the cross as the moment which rips open the graves, he proclaims that the insidious force of death, one of the punishments for breaking the covenant, has met its match. The life-giving power of God is able to restore what death has destroyed. In addition, the arrival of the kingdom brings an ethical change to Jesus’ followers. The way of salvation is not just emancipation from the threat of disease or death. As one writer put it, “… the way of salvation stressed by Matthew is doing the will of God.”748 This point is stressed most clearly in the Sermon on the Mount wherein Jesus does not abolish the law but instead heightens its expectations. In fact, the risen Christ’s last

words in the Gospel end by commanding his followers to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations … teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20a).

Continuing to live in the kingdom necessitates a different way of living life. Luomanen summarizes Matthew’s holistic soteriology well: “Thus, on broad terms, Matthew’s understanding of the content of salvation can be determined as the restoration of the wholeness of life under God’s/Jesus’ rule and in his presence.”

For Matthew, Jesus’ death is an eschatological event that ushers in this very wholeness.

5.C. Luke

Luke begins his account of the Last Supper by identifying the day, like Mark and Matthew, as the day when “the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed” (Luke 22:7). Though Matthew and Mark fail to identify which disciples prepare the Last Supper, Luke has specified that the task fell to Peter and John (Luke 22:8). More frequently than the other Gospels, Luke reiterates multiple times that this is a Passover meal. Moreover, Jesus begins the meal by saying, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-6). Not only does the statement affirm the paschal setting of the meal, but it also explicitly combines Israel’s past deliverance in the exodus with Jesus’ proclamation that God’s kingdom was about to dawn. In other words, as they celebrated the Passover, they were on the cusp of God’s restoration.

---

749 Luomanen, *Kingdom of Heaven*, 280. Despite this accurate assessment, Luomanen seems to downplay the atoning elements to Matthew’s soteriology unnecessarily.

750 By way of comparison, Mark mentions the “Passover” five different times (Mark 14:1, 12[2x], 13, 14), Matthew references it four different times (Matt. 26:2, 17, 18, 19), and Luke mentions it on six different occasions (Luke 22:1, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13).

After this announcement, Jesus first takes a cup—not a loaf of bread—and after blessing it says, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:17-8). Luke’s introduction of a cup before the bread has spawned debate over whether this reflects a different form of Eucharist that celebrated the cup before the bread. Though possible, especially if one takes the shorter reading of the Last Supper as authentic, such arguments fail to take Luke very seriously. He has repeatedly informed the reader that this was a Passover meal. If later prescriptions for Passover are a reliable guide to first century practice, their celebration of the Passover would have involved a series of cups, not simply one as in Eucharistic practice. Thus, when Luke speaks of a cup before the bread he is likely referring to one of the first cups that were drunk during the course of the Passover celebration. The introduction of another cup before the bread should reaffirm his depiction of the meal as a Passover celebration.

Luke’s account has placed Jesus’ expression of the kingdom’s immanence in the first cup saying. Though Mark and Matthew place it at the end of the sayings over the bread and wine, Luke has placed it at the front, which only serves to emphasize the immanence of the kingdom. The events symbolized by the meal, Jesus’ death, will precipitate the arrival of the kingdom when “it is fulfilled” (Luke 22:16).

The very next step in the progression of the supper is the breaking of the bread. However, this is the point at which things become a bit more complicated simply because the supporting manuscripts have two vastly different readings of the account. The vast majority of manuscripts, including P, א, A, B, and C, support the longer reading, which includes all of verses Luke 22:19-20:

752 m. Pesah, 10.2-7 (Neusner).
753 Ibid., 1397.
Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

However, in some manuscripts and translations, verses 19 and 20 are altered, transposed, or deleted entirely.754 The alternative option, the shorter reading, stops in the middle of Luke 22:19 and has an abridged form of the word over the bread: “Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body.’” Thus, the two major variants of Luke 22:19-20 present vastly different portraits of what was said and therefore communicated at the Last Supper. Moreover, the adoption of the longer or shorter reading is theologically significant. If the shorter reading is deemed to be earlier and therefore more likely to reflect the original reading, Luke’s Last Supper account lacks any reference to the inauguration of the new covenant and removes the atoning implications that we observed in Mark and Matthew altogether. Furthermore, since Luke has only a few passages that suggest Jesus’ death is an atonement for sin—one of which is the longer reading of Luke 22:19b-20—determining the viability of the longer reading is essential for understanding Luke’s theology of the cross as a whole. Certainly, this question is also critical for ascertaining the nature of the Eucharistic pattern exhibited by Luke. If the shorter reading is authentic, then Luke betrays an inverted Eucharistic pattern where the wine was imbibed prior to the consumption of the bread. This particular investigation into Luke’s understanding of Jesus’ death proceeds with the assumption that the longer reading is earlier, and the following excursus defends the use of the longer version in this study.

754 The Uncial D and some of the Italian translations (ita, d, ff2, i, l) are missing the final part of Luke 22:19, “which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” and the entirety of 22:20, the cup saying. The itb,e translations also have the same abridged version of Luke 22:19 with no 22:20, yet Luke 22:19 has been transposed before Luke 22:17-18, which was most likely done in order to cohere with the traditional Eucharistic practice of sharing in the bread before the wine. The same thing occurs in syr though the text has a fuller version of Luke 22:19. The version syr has portions of Luke 22:20 interpolated throughout Luke 22:17-18, while syr⁶ has dropped Luke 22:17-18 entirely. The text of these variants has been charted in Metzger, Textual Commentary, 149.
Excursus: The Longer or the Shorter Reading?

The inclusion of Luke 22:19b-20 finds its strongest support in the external evidence. In comparison with the shorter reading, it boasts the widest geographical distribution of supporting texts and can claim the majority of witnesses in its favor, including the earliest ones. Not only does the shorter reading lack a comparable range of manuscript support, some scholars have also impugned the quality of the texts that omit Luke 22:19b-20. For example, Jeremias believed that the tendency of the principal manuscript witness for the shorter reading, Codex Bezae (D), to shorten readings on occasions where the longer text was original jeopardizes its ability to produce a reliable reading in this instance. Such assessments on the quality of Codex Bezae have been validated by David Parker who, though supporting the shorter reading of Luke’s Last Supper saying, observed the freedom codex D possesses in emending the text to the point of freely adding words to Jesus. Thus, with ample manuscript support from diversified regions, the external evidence provides the most persuasive reason to adopt Luke 22:19b-20 as the earlier reading, and scholars who support the longer reading usually do so on this basis.

---

755 Manuscripts with Luke 22:19b-20 include: P, X, A, B, C, L, T, W, Δ, Θ, Ψ, f1, f13, 157, 180, 205, 565, 579, 597, 700, 892, 1006, 1010, 1071, 1241, 1243, 1292, 1342, 1424, 1505 Byz, [E G H N] Lect along with several versions and Eusebian Canons (Basil) and Augustine. By comparison, the support of some form of omission is rather limited: D, it1, it2, 1, 1b, e, syr, s.


758 Bart D. Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 233. According to Ehrman, who undeniably favors the shorter reading, the external evidence is insignificant in his estimation since “both readings, the shorter and the longer, must have been available to scribes of the second century.” Because both readings were present in the second century, he regards the external evidence of equal weight and bases his decision upon the internal evidence alone. While both readings might be traceable to the second century, the external evidence also reveals how widespread a particular reading is. The more manuscript families representing a particular reading the more likely its origin reaches back even further towards the beginnings of the textual tradition. The fact that only a portion of the Western witnesses supports the shorter reading of the Last Supper should not be passed over as lightly as Ehrman does. In my opinion, the two readings do not have equal support from the external evidence, even if they were both current at the end of the second century.
However, the internal evidence produces a much more complicated picture. Based upon the transcriptional probabilities, some scholars have argued that the shorter reading is the original one for the following reasons. (1) It is both the shorter and more difficult reading, which means it is more likely to be altered than longer and smoother readings.759 (2) The longer text can be explained as an assimilation of Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians and Mark. Ehrman put it the following way: “… it is well-nigh impossible to explain the shorter text of Luke 22:19-20 if the longer text is original. But it is not at all difficult to account for an interpolation of the disputed words into Luke’s brief account of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples.”760 In other words, one can more readily explain why a scribe, baffled by the shorter reading, would feel compelled to assimilate Luke’s shorter reading with what he knew from Mark and Paul. It is much more difficult to explain why a scribe would ever want to delete content from the longer reading. (3) The longer text departs from Luke’s traditional verbiage and formulations.761 (4) The longer text departs from Luke’s putative tendency to avoid atonement theology. In this regard, Ehrman argues that “Luke has actually gone out of his way to eliminate” notions of atonement theology that were present in his Markan source.762

In support of the latter point, scholars usually advance three important observations. First, Luke has deleted Mark’s term “ransom” from a similar saying in Luke 22:24-7, which

---

759 The first three are adapted from Henry Chadwick, “The Shorter Text of Luke 22:15-20,” HTR 50, no. 4 (1957): 252. Chadwick goes on to provide an elaborate explanation for the difficulty of the shorter reading by suggesting Luke was dependent upon a source with an abbreviated account and assimilated it with additions from Mark. Even on his own admission, though, his proposal for why the author left the shorter account in its convoluted state fails to impress. A shorter or more difficult reading still needs to make sense in light of what is known of the author, and Chadwick fails to provide an explanation for why the author of Luke would be content to let the short reading stand as it is, especially if he were following Mark too.


some have taken as grounds for Luke’s rejection of atonement theology and the unlikelihood that he would include the longer version of the Last Supper. Second, though Luke directly connects Jesus with the final servant song of Isaiah, he never cites the portions of the song that would suggest Jesus’ death functions as a vicarious atonement. Third, the sermons in Acts unanimously fault the Jewish people for Christ’s death and credit God with the resurrection. Typical here is a line from Peter’s sermon in Acts 2: “… this man … you crucified and killed …. But God raised him up” (Acts 2:23-4). According to the argument, such constructions annul divine involvement in the crucifixion and place the culpability solely on the shoulders of human agents. On these bases, some have argued that the atonement theology present in the longer version of the Last Supper is incongruous with Luke’s theology of the cross, and therefore the longer version cannot represent the original reading.

Though these arguments are forceful, they are not without rejoinders. Regarding the first argument (1), it is certainly true that the shorter reading represents the most difficult reading and would more likely encourage a scribe to assimilate it to other accounts. However, to decide the matter solely on the basis of shorter or more difficult readings precludes the exploration of other options. In homeoteleuton, scribes accidentally delete content when they lose their place by confusing words with the same or similar ending. Such an accident would create a more difficult and shorter reading, but it could not claim authenticity on these grounds alone. Though homeoteleuton does not appear to be a problem with Luke 22:19b-20, there are other possibilities.

764 Ehrman, Corruption of Scripture, 238. Because of the theological tendency of Luke, Ehrman says, “The conclusion appears unavoidable: either Luke constructed his narrative with blinding inconsistency or he penned the shorter form of the text, known to us from the Western tradition.” I would suggest another alternative, namely, that Luke had a more theologically complex view than many allow him to have, which did not make his inclusion of the longer version an inconsistency.
that might explain its deletion, which will be discussed shortly. Just because a particular reading is shorter or more difficult does not mean it is therefore the earlier reading.

In response to (2), one can say that Luke 22:19b-20 possesses and lacks elements present in both Mark and Paul (see chart below). For example, in the bread saying, Luke uses λέγων, which differs from the other three accounts who all use εἶπεν. In addition, Luke is the only one who inserts διδόμενον into the bread saying. Moreover, the final cup saying also has several differences from the other accounts. For example, the longer reading of Luke has ὡσαύτως, which is absent in the other accounts. In addition, the longer reading of Luke clarifies that this blood is “poured out for you” (τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον), which is not present in Paul’s version and differs from Mark, which has “for many.” Though an insignificant alteration as far as meaning is concerned, Luke’s cup saying deletes the ἐστὶν that is present in all the other accounts. Finally, Paul’s final command to repeat the Eucharist as a remembrance is missing in the saying over the wine. Clearly, Luke’s longer reading differs from both Mark and Paul in important ways, and these differences should not be passed over quickly.
Luke’s Longer Reading in Comparison with Mark and 1 Corinthians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ἅρτον εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἐδώκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐπεν, λάβετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα μου. καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐπιν ἐς αὐτοῦ πάντες. καὶ ἐπεν αὐτοῖς, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμα μου τῆς διάθηκης τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν.</td>
<td>καὶ λαβὼν ἅρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἐδώκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡσαύτως μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι, λέγων, τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καὶνή διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματι μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον.</td>
<td>Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣν παρεδίδετο ἐλαβεν ἅρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἐπεν, τοῦτο μοῦ ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι λέγων, τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καὶνὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσάκις εὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though one cannot rule out the possibility that Luke’s version is a carefree amalgamation of Mark and Paul, it is certainly not the amalgamation that one would expect. Can we assume that a conscientious scribe, worried about the glaring absence in Luke’s version of the Last Supper, would freely insert words and phrases that depart from all of the other major accounts? This explanation for the longer text’s origin is hardly persuasive, in my opinion. In fact, observing the kinds of alterations the scribes who were confronted with the shorter reading actually did make suggests that scribes would not be as carefree to amalgamate Mark and Paul, freely adding words and deleting others. Of course, some copied the text as they had received it, but others felt compelled to alter the text in various ways. The copyists of it moved the bread saying (Luke 22:19a) in front of the cup saying of Luke 22:17 in order to introduce the traditional bread-cup order typical of the other accounts without introducing any apparently

766 Based upon the texts translated in Metzger, Textual Commentary, 149.
foreign words. The syr\(\text{c}\) likewise followed suit and transposed the bread saying before the cup saying. The key difference, though, is that the bread saying has been harmonized with Paul’s account in 1 Cor. 11:24, but not with Mark’s. Though our sample size is small, what we do have is illustrative. What we do not find is a harmonization that cross-pollinates Mark and Paul or freely introduces novel elements. The scribes that did alter the shorter reading were very conservative and did one of two things. Either they used only the material in Luke’s shorter reading to create a bread-cup sequence or they relied on only one of the other accounts for their harmonization (in the case of syr\(\text{c}\) only Paul). As a result, I am unpersuaded by this explanation for the longer reading’s origin. Quite simply, it does not match what other scribes actually did when they felt impelled to make Luke’s shorter reading conform to the other accounts.

Still, this does not explain how the shorter reading entered the textual tradition. Some have suggested that a scribe, flummoxed by Luke’s cup-bread-cup order, deleted the second cup saying to make it harmonize with the other accounts.\(^{767}\) This is not particularly satisfying because if a scribe were puzzled by the cup-bread-cup sequence, a scribe would be much more likely to delete the first cup that had little theological significance attached to it rather than the one that associated the wine with the blood of Christ.\(^{768}\) In fact, this is what we find in syr\(\text{p}\), and suggests that other scribes would likely do something similar.

Probably the most common explanation advanced for why the shorter text arose has been that an early scribe deleted the portions of the Last Supper sayings that might be confused with drinking blood, which might be perceived by outsiders as cannibalistic.\(^{769}\) This argument has


\(^{769}\) See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 148-50; Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 156-9. McGowan cautions scholars from assuming the second century condemnations of Christians as cannibalistic were misunderstandings of
recently been resuscitated by Bradly Billings who has shown that, in the late second century, Christians were calumniated in Lyons for their “Thyestean banquets,” which likely denounced their rites of partaking of the body and blood of Christ. Billings attempts to explain the omission of Luke 22:19b-20 by locating the exemplar for Codex Bezae (D) in Lyons during this time when Christians were under intense scrutiny for their Eucharistic practices. According to him, a scribe, desiring to protect his community from violence, deleted the incriminating evidence in the Gospel of Luke. To be sure, Billings’ proposal does seem highly contingent upon placing the exemplar of Codex Bezae—a fourth century codex—in Lyons during the latter portion of the second century. This is a thinly woven argument and is open to criticism at various points. However, Billings’ suggestion does not need to be so tightly wed to the historical situation in Lyons in order for his more general point to still hold true. If one takes the situation in Lyons as an example of the kind of accusations and political pressures some Christians faced, one can demonstrate that there would be motivation for scribes dwelling in similar locales to omit the saying that would jeopardize their safety.

Independent of Girard, McGowan observes that groups who threatened society were often indemnified as cannibals. As a result, the charge of Christians being cannibals could be related more to their growing threat to the social order than a metaphysical misunderstanding about the Eucharist. Andrew McGowan, “Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism against Christians in the Second Century,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 4 (1994): 413-442. While McGowan is right to utter caution here, some of the accusations do bear an uncanny resemblance to the Eucharist, especially Minucius’ description of the ritual as one in which a child was hidden under grain to be dismembered and have its blood lapped up (Minucius, *Octavius*, 9.5). When Tertullian talks about the supposed loaves that were soaked in blood, I can only imagine that this refers to some kind of Eucharistic practice (Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, 1.7). The often stand alone accusations of eating human flesh lends itself toward a view that equates the Eucharist with cannibalism (e.g. Tatian, *oratio ad graecos*, 25). As a result, I am more inclined to see the charges of cannibalism or “Thyestean banquets” related to the Eucharist itself. See Billings, “Disputed Words,” 518-9.


Arguing for a theologically motivated deletion as well, but along a different train of thought, Petri Luomanen has connected the shorter version of Luke’s Last Supper sayings with the Ebionites who had theological reasons for deleting the longer version.\textsuperscript{773} The Ebionites, for example, believed Jesus came “to abolish sacrifices, not to replace them.”\textsuperscript{774} As a result, Jesus could not, as the longer reading suggests both in the longer version of the bread saying and the final cup saying, be the sacrifice to replace the Old Testament sacrificial system with his own death. Moreover, the Ebionite practice of the Eucharist utilized water in place of wine, which indicates their departure from traditional celebrations of the Last Supper that utilized wine. Because the Ebionites had a non-sacrificial view of Christ’s death, perhaps an Ebionite or a scribe cognizant of the \textit{Gospel of the Ebionites} is responsible for intentionally deleting Luke 22:19b-20 for theological and liturgical reasons.

Though neither proposal fully rises above criticism, they do reveal that there are several theological reasons that could have prompted a scribe to emend the text. Of the two, I find Luomanen’s argument more likely, because it can explain why Luke 22:19a, which equates the bread with Christ’s body, still remains. Surely, if the text were emended to delete references to cannibalism as Billings suggests, this portion would be altered as well. Thus, I find Billings the least persuasive here. However, Luomanen’s observation that the Ebionites did not have a sacrificial understanding of Jesus’ death would be enough reason to prompt someone to delete the relevant portions from the text since it would bring their sacramental theology into question. Though we cannot know all of the reasons why a scribe would alter the text, it is not as difficult to explain as Ehrman suggests.


\textsuperscript{774} Ibid., 194. This conclusion is based on Epiphanius, \textit{Panarion}, 1.30.16.5.
(3) Some have argued that several of the words in Luke 22:19b-20 depart from Luke’s normal word usage.\textsuperscript{775} This argument is not very forceful, for the purported non-Lukan words can be simply attributed to a pre-Lukan source just as much as to a later copyist. Their presence is inconclusive. In fact, Joel Green’s study of the sources and redaction in the Passion accounts indicates that Luke’s account of the Last Supper was “a literary unit prior to Luke’s writing,” a point he makes based partially on the presence of non-Lukan words.\textsuperscript{776} In other words, Luke was likely following a written source at this juncture and not putting an oral account into his own words. As a result, the presence of “non-Lukan” words hardly supports the rejection of the longer reading.

(4) We will return to the question of Luke’s theology of atonement intermittently throughout this analysis, but suffice it to say here that the argument Luke has intentionally expunged all forms of atonement theology seems a bit tendentious, especially when it is used to discredit one of the primary texts that might cast a different picture of Luke’s theology. Furthermore, a theology of atonement is overtly expressed in one of Paul’s conversations with the Ephesian elders at the end of Acts where he charges them “to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his son” (Acts 20:28).\textsuperscript{777} Ehrman, though, contends that even this verse possesses no atonement theology because being “obtained with the blood” does not automatically infer an atonement theology or a theology of exchange. Instead, he contends we should see how Luke uses “blood” in Luke-Acts, and he turns to Acts 5:27-31 to do so. In this passage, the high priest faults the apostles for trying “to bring this man’s blood on us” (Acts

\textsuperscript{775} These are summarized in Billings, \textit{This Do in Remembrance}, 26-32.  
\textsuperscript{776} Joel B. Green, \textit{The Death of Jesus: Tradition and Interpretation in the Passion Narrative} (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 42. In fact, Green suggests that Luke’s account of the passion utilized Mark in addition to another “unified narrative like Mark’s” (Ibid., 104).  
\textsuperscript{777} Jeremias thinks this betrays the belief in Christ’s death as “an atoning sacrifice.” See Jeremias, \textit{Eucharistic Words}, 157. Some theologians completely ignore this text in their assessment of Lukan theology. E.g. Finlan, \textit{Options on Atonement}, 38. Finlan treats Luke as if it were an individual volume instead of part one of a two volume work.
5:28), which basically refers to their guilt in Jesus’ death. In light of this passage, Ehrman concludes that Acts 20:28 does not refer to some kind of atonement on the part of Christ but rather concludes, “The blood of Jesus produces the church because it brings the cognizance of guilt that leads to repentance.”\(^7\) While Luke certainly emphasizes the guilt of the various parties involved in Jesus’ death in order to invite them to repentance, one cannot thereby conclude that the use of Christ’s blood in Acts 20:28 contains no reference to a theology of atonement. The very passage under contention, Luke 22:19b-20, also speaks of blood and it introduces an atoning element to Jesus’ blood. If Luke 22:19b-20 is authentic, then Ehrman’s exegesis of blood in Acts 20:28 disintegrates, for we would then have another Lukan passage that infuses Christ’s blood with atoning value. As a result, the question of Luke’s theology of atonement should proceed after one has determined whether Luke 22:19b-20 is original.

Because it is a passage that plays a vital role in the overall picture, its authenticity cannot be made to rest on a preconceived idea for what Luke did or could have believed about Jesus’ death. In fact, I will argue in the following sections that the longer reading of the Last Supper is integral to the thought of Luke-Acts and not contrary to it as some assert.

Thus far, we have observed that the internal evidence in favor of the shorter reading, though forceful, can be explained through alternative proposals and does not mandate a decision in its favor. As a result, the longer reading (Luke 22:19b-20) seems preferable for several reasons. First, the sheer preponderance of the external evidence, namely, the widespread geographical distribution coupled with the support of early witnesses weighs in favor of the longer reading. Indeed, it is difficult to explain how, if the shorter reading were original, there are not more manuscripts in support of the shorter reading or different attempts at harmonizing Luke’s account with Mark or Paul. We do not have a plethora of such attempts, and it seems that

\(^7\) Ehrman, *Corruption of Scripture*, 237.
the best explanation is that the longer text is original and that some scribe, perhaps theologically motivated, deleted Luke 22:19b-20. The corrupted manuscript was able to influence the Codex Bezae and the Italian and Syriac versions, but its secondary nature can be seen in the fact that it never influenced a wider array of manuscripts or even the entirety of the Western text type.

Second, I will argue later in the following sections that the longer reading is theologically and thematically integrated into the rest of Luke’s Gospel. If this case can be made, then we have ample reason to believe that the longer text was the one Luke originally penned.

5.C.1. Analysis of Longer Reading

The Words of Institution in Mark and Luke

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ἅρτον εὐλογήσας ἐκλασεν καὶ ἐδοκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπεν, λάβετε, τοῦτο ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα μου.</td>
<td>Καὶ λαβὼν ἅρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἐκλασεν καὶ ἐδοκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, τοῦτο ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας ἐδοκεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔπιον ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες. Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, τοῦτο ἐστιν τὸ αἷμα μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν.</td>
<td>Καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡς αὐτῶς μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι, λέγων, τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assuming that the longer reading of Luke 22:19-20 is earlier, what are the theological implications of the words given in Luke’s account? After passing the first cup, the longer reading has the following: “Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’” (Luke 22:19). As in the other accounts, Jesus takes the paschal bread, which recalled Israel’s redemption from Egypt. Like the other Synoptics, the bread no longer looks solely to Israel’s past because the attention is now directed to the immediate future with

---

779 The words in common are unchanged, while the words that are different have been underlined to highlight the differences in each account.
780 M. Pesah., 10:5.
Jesus’ death looming on the horizon. To describe Jesus’ prayer over the bread, Luke uses a different word for Jesus’ blessing in his account, εὐχαριστήσας, which identifies this rite as a “Eucharist” (see chart above). Mark, though, uses the same word in the cup saying, so the term appears synonymous with Mark’s εὐλογήσας and does not significantly alter the meaning.

Although the accounts of Mark and Matthew have supplied little in the bread saying about the soteriological implications of Jesus’ death, Luke has provided more. He specifically identifies his body as that which “is given (διδόμενον).” The word can be used in a generic way to refer to any kind of giving, but it can also refer to sacrificial giving. In fact, when the verb occurs in conjunction with the preposition ὑπὲρ in the rest of the New Testament, the word most often refers to the sacrificial giving up of Jesus on behalf of his people. This is the meaning that Fitzmyer suggests is utilized here, if not because of the verb itself, for the prepositional phrase “for you (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν)” that identifies the beneficiaries of the gift. In fact, a sacrificial understanding of Christ’s giving of his body is almost required here, for ὑπὲρ with the genitive frequently signifies the beneficiaries of a particular action. By identifying his body as that which “is given for you,” Jesus is indicating that he has chosen to forfeit his life sacrificially in order to benefit his disciples. While Luke’s bread saying does not clarify how his death would benefit his disciples, it clearly confirms that it would. Luke also differs from Mark by adding the following command at the end of the bread saying: “Do this in remembrance of me.” The present tense imperative (ποιεῖτε) likely bears the implication that this should be an ongoing practice for his disciples. As a result, Luke’s bread saying implies liturgical repetition.

781 BDAG, 242. Particularly relevant here are 2 Cor. 8:5; Mt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; and 1 Tim. 2:6.
782 John 6:51; Galatians 1:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; and Titus 2:14.
784 BDAG, 1030. Wallace argues that ὑπὲρ frequently signifies substitution in many places in the New Testament. The substitutionary aspect seems implicit because, if an action is being performed for the benefit of someone else, one is doing it in their place. See Wallace, Greek Grammar, 383-89.
Luke possibly alludes to a temporal interval between the bread saying and the cup saying since the next statement occurs “after supper,” at which point Jesus takes a second cup and says, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). In contrast to Mark, Luke places the attention on the cup rather than on the blood, but this should not be used to indicate that Luke has thereby suppressed the reference to blood. In referring to the cup, Luke surely intends to signify the contents of the cup, namely, the wine which Jesus equates with his blood. In the Old Testament, blood was equivalent to one’s life, no doubt a realization that loss of blood quickly brought about one’s demise (Lev. 17:14). Thus, by equating the cup with Jesus’ blood, Jesus is signifying his coming death. Like Mark and Matthew, Luke employs ἐκχυννόμενον to describe what will happen to the contents of the cup. As was noted earlier in the discussion on Mark, ἐκχυννόμενον, especially when used in conjunction with blood, was often used to describe the cultic act of sacrifice. The same association applies here as well, which means both the bread and the cup sayings in Luke use sacrificial language to describe Jesus’ death. In addition, the cup saying also identifies the beneficiaries of this sacrifice using the same prepositional phrase “for you (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν)” as he utilized in the bread saying. In light of this, it is clear that Luke’s longer reading of the Last Supper emphasizes the sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death, which is given in order to benefit his disciples. In fact, one can argue that Luke’s institution narrative, which has used sacrificial language in both the bread and the cup saying, is more sacrificial than Mark’s.

Thus far we have observed that both the bread and the cup saying affirm that Jesus’ death would benefit his disciples, but what does Jesus’ death accomplish for his disciples? The cup saying clearly specifies what is accomplished by Jesus death, for the cup is none other than “the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). Just like Matthew and Mark, Jesus’ death will be the
means by which the covenant with YHWH is inaugurated anew. However, Luke has one peculiar difference from Mark and Matthew in that he has identified this covenant as the “new covenant (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη).” The addition of the adjective “new” changes the direction of the Old Testament allusion and brings the eschatological promises of Jeremiah 31 to the fore. The entire chapter of Jeremiah 31 anticipates God’s restoration of Israel, of which the new covenant is one specific part of the larger vision of Israel’s restoration. Since it is an essential part of Luke’s understanding of the Last Supper, the passage can be quoted in full again here:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-4).

We have already noted that Jesus’ Last Supper had taken the Passover’s orientation to Israel’s past redemption in the exodus and redirected it toward what was about to be accomplished in the immediate future. This redirection from the past to the future is also present in the new covenant promise where YHWH promises that the new covenant “will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (Jer. 31:32). In a surprisingly similar way, Jesus’ words of interpretation at the Last Supper do the same thing. Israel’s salvation is no longer in the past, by now at hand.

According to Jeremiah, the arrival of the new covenant would bring several things. First, God would put his “law within them.” The exile had occurred because God’s covenantal stipulations recorded in the law had been broken. The internalization of the law speaks to the transformation of God’s covenant partner towards obedience. Thus, the new covenant would
bring an ethical transformation of God’s people, an internal transformation in which God would write the law “on their hearts.” Second, YHWH says, “they shall all know me” (Jer. 31:34), which implies that the knowledge of God will no longer be mediated by others. Finally, YHWH concludes with the reason why he could inaugurate a new covenant: “… I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34). In the context of Israel’s story, her sin and unfaithfulness had resulted in the exile and her punishment at the hands of foreign nations. The forgiveness of this sin would mean the end of the exile. In other words, Israel’s restoration would commence when God forgave his people and inaugurated the new covenantal relationship with her. When Jesus says the cup is the “new covenant (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη) in my blood,” he is announcing to his listeners that this great eschatological hope was coming true in his death. Thus, Jesus’ death would be the event that ushered in the eschatological restoration of God’s people. The age of Jeremiah’s new covenant was dawning.

Even though Luke’s account of the Last Supper has the clearest allusion to Jeremiah 31:31 of the Synoptics, this by no means excludes some of the other Old Testament texts like Exodus 24:8 and Zechariah 9:11. Jeremiah says nothing about the new covenant being sealed in blood, or as Jesus says, “in my blood (ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου).” The only other texts that combine the inauguration of the covenant with blood are Exodus 24:8 and Zechariah 9:11, which means these texts have not been displaced by moving Jeremiah 31:31 to the fore. Their continued presence in Luke’s version brings the atoning significance of Jesus’ death into play too. In fact, by keeping all three passages (Jer. 31:31-4; Exod. 24:8; Zech. 9:11) in view, one can conclude that

785 Nolland, Luke 18:35-24:53, 1054; Bornkamm, Early Christian Experience, 140; and Tan, Zion Traditions, 216. Tan affirms the twin allusion to Exodus and Jeremiah, but he fails to incorporate the Zechariah passage.
the forgiveness of sins promised in the new covenant is made possible by Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.\textsuperscript{786}

The sequence of events after the distribution of the bread and the cup in Luke also differs from the other Synoptics. After passing the cup, Jesus announces that one of them will betray him, which instigates several disputes. The first concerns who would actually betray Jesus, but the second is a dispute regarding which of them was the greatest. Mark and Matthew record a similar dispute among the disciples regarding their importance. In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus authoritatively ends the dispute with the renowned ransom saying (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28). In Luke, Jesus responds in a different way, without identifying his death as a ransom: “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?” (Luke 22:25-6). Instead of ending with the assertion that he would give his life as a ransom, Luke’s version simply has Jesus saying, “But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27).

For many, this constitutes a Lukan redaction intentionally aimed at deleting any reference to atonement theology. However, there are several factors which do not warrant such a conclusion. First, its proximity to the Last Supper sayings clarifies for the reader that Jesus’ service is his death as a covenant-inaugurating sacrifice.\textsuperscript{787} Mark and Matthew both situate the saying much earlier in their Gospels. With its location disconnected from the Last Supper, they


had to make lexical connections to connect the ransom saying to the Last Supper. What Luke might lack in the absence of the word “ransom” or the prepositional phrase “for many” he has made up for by placing his discussion on service immediately after the Last Supper account. The only kind of service in view is his death as a covenant-inaugurating sacrifice.  

Second, there are lexical connections that tie the saying about service immediately back to what just occurred at the Last Supper. In Jesus’ rebuke of his disciples, he asks “For who is greater, the one who is at the table (ὁ ἀνακείμενος) or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table (ὁ ἀνακείμενος)?” (Luke 22:27). This particular sentence is absent in Mark and Matthew’s version of the ransom saying, yet its presence reveals Luke’s emphasis. On the one hand, it constitutes an intratextual allusion back to Jesus’ teaching that the faithful servant will be served by his master at the banquet (Luke 12:35-8). On the other hand, Luke is referring to the events that have just been narrated regarding the Last Supper. At the Last Supper, Jesus served his disciples with a meal at a table, and this meal symbolized an ever greater service, namely, that he would give his life for their benefit. Luke’s unique additions about being served at a table demand that we interpret his service in light of what just occurred at the Last Supper.

Third, many have observed that Luke’s Passion narrative, including his Last Supper discourse, has followed a source other than Mark. This does in fact seem to be the case since

---


789 Luke 22:14 introduces the setting in a way that Mark does not: “When the hour came, he took his place at the table (ἀνέπεσεν), and the apostles with him.” Though ἀναπίπτω need not imply the presence of a table, it was often used in the context of meals and therefore connoted the presence of a table (BDAG, 70). The verb ἀνάκειμαι used in Luke 22:27 appears synonymous in the context. As a result, Luke’s unique reference to serving at a table very likely builds upon the immediately preceding episode (i.e. the Last Supper), which occurred while they were reclining at the table.

790 Green, Death of Jesus, 46. For evidence, he shows that some of the words used in the passage are hapax legomena and depart from traditional Lukan style (e.g. φιλονεικία, ἐξουσιάζω, and εὐεργέτης). It is also hard to explain why Luke would reduce Mark’s κατακυριεύω to the simpler κυριεύω. As a result, he concludes that Luke is
Luke has arranged events and sayings in the Last Supper account quite differently than Mark does, which is not true of Matthew’s account which follows Mark quite closely. If Luke is relying upon a non-Markan source at this point, there is no need to see Luke’s lack of the word “ransom” in this saying as an intentional deletion of atonement theology. To put it bluntly, Jesus’ service to his disciples is spelled out in the immediately preceding section where he interpreted his death as the inauguration of the new covenant.

For this reason, the followers of Girard who rely upon Luke’s version of the saying in order to suggest that we should not interpret Matthew and Mark’s ransom saying sacrificially miss the point. Luke’s saying on service derives its force from the Last Supper saying that immediately precedes it. Even if one believes Luke has intentionally deleted a theology of exchange from his form of the logion, it by no means allows one to delete such notions from Matthew and Mark as some of Girard’s followers have done. Moreover, we cannot, as Bartlett does, use this logion as the hermeneutical key for understanding Luke’s Last Supper sayings. Quite frankly, the inverse occurs. Luke’s Last Supper account defines the kind of service Jesus performs on behalf of his followers. It is the very service he has just discussed before them “at the table”: he would give his life as a covenant-inaugurating sacrifice.

5.C.2. Postlude

Jesus’ statement about service is directly applicable to the disciples who will need to incarnate this form of leadership because Jesus turns and says to them, “You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer (διατίθεμαι) on you, just as my Father has conferred

---

not altering Mark but dependent on an earlier source. See also Marshall, Last Supper, 102; Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 98-9.

792 Bartlett, Cross Purposes, 212.
(διέθετό) on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28-30). Here is one of the most explicit assertions from Jesus that he stands in possession of the kingdom and serves as its king. In doing so, it is only to turn it over to his disciples who will receive this kingdom and judge the twelve tribes. In addition, the statement affirms that Jesus’ role in the kingdom—and hence Israel’s restoration—is being passed on to his disciples who will function as Israel’s judges. This saying following the Last Supper sayings again reminds the reader of the eschatological significance of what is about to transpire and affirms that the arrival of the kingdom is synonymous with the restoration of Israel.

A few other conversations occur before Luke ends the Last Supper discourse. Jesus first predicts that Peter will deny him three times despite Peter’s avowal that he will be faithful to death. Then Jesus gives his disciples an enigmatic command to go and buy a sword (Luke 22:36). At this point, Jesus launches into a prediction formula: “For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted among the lawless (ἀνόμων); and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled’” (Luke 22:37).

This logion about buying swords has mystified many. Who exactly are the “lawless” ones? Some have argued it would be the disciples, hence the need to attain the swords, so they could be considered bandits. Others have suggested that the “lawless” ones anticipate the coming crucifixion where Jesus is crucified alongside “criminals (κακοφηγοί)” (Luke 23:32). Without getting sidetracked by the particular

---

793 Scott Hahn has argued forcefully that διέθετό has the connotation of covenanting, instead of leaving a last will and testament. While this is persuasive, it is not entirely persuasive to me that the covenant in view during Luke’s Last Supper sayings is predominantly the Davidic covenant as he argues. Hahn, Kinship by Covenant, 217-37. Regarding the connection between Christ’s covenant and the kingdom in the passage, see also Cooke, “Covenant Sacrifice,” 37.

794 It is ambiguous if Luke is referring only to the particular portion that he quotes or to the entirety of Isaiah’s final servant song. Luke is clearly aware of the larger context since it is quoted in Acts 8:32-33. As a result, one can assume that the larger context might be in mind.

identity of the lawless people, the more important part of this saying is the fact that Isaiah 53:12 is cited as the prophecy that “must be fulfilled in me” (Luke 22:37). In fact, this is the only citation of Isaiah 53 in the Synoptic tradition. The necessity of this prophecy, which also describes the suffering and vindication of YHWH’s servant smoothly segues the reader into the betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion of the Messiah.796 The events about to unfold mirror the experiences of the Isaianic servant who is also marred and maltreated by others, but ultimately is vindicated by God.

5.C.3. Integration with the Rest of the Gospel

Up to this point, I have argued that the longer version of the Luke’s Last Supper tradition is authentic and that it affirms that the new covenant era has dawned, being ushered in by Jesus’ death, which is a covenant-inaugurating sacrifice. Though the notion of Christ’s death as atonement is not the only theme present in the sayings, it certainly seems to be one of the dominant points of the text. However, if we are to conclude that Luke’s Last Supper sayings also present Jesus’ death as an atonement for sin, we can only do so by dissenting with the sentiment of much Lukan scholarship.797 For example, consider Conzelmann’s bold declaration that the author of Luke-Acts betrays “no trace of any Passion mysticism, nor is any direct


soteriological significance drawn from Jesus’ suffering or death. There is no suggestion of a connection with the forgiveness of sins.” 798 Conzelmann’s position is typical of many in the field. Even conservative scholars like Tannehill follow in his stead: “The death of Jesus is never interpreted as atonement for sins in the mission speeches of Acts, nor is the death of Jesus ever singled out as the basis for the release of sins or the salvation in Jesus’ name which the missionaries are proclaiming.” 799 For the most part, similar sentiment remains entrenched in Lukan scholarship with recent theologians still avering that Luke “originally contained not a single hit of atonement.” 800 Thus, for many, Luke has either entirely expunged atonement theology from his account or repressed it. 801

Some voices have cautioned against such an outright denial of Lukan atonement theology. 802 In addition, there have been a few projects, some of which have not been all that


802 Marshall has wryly countered the common presumption that Luke has a decisively curtailed notion of atonement. He points out that Mark only has an explicit atonement theology in two passages: the ransom saying (Mark 10:45) and the Last Supper. On this account, Luke has only one less in this regard than Mark. Marshall, Last Supper, 102.
persuasive, that have tried to find lingering evidence of an atonement theology in Luke-Acts. For example, Carpinelli has argued that Luke still retains a theology of expiation informed by the LXX.\textsuperscript{803} For him, the decisive data lies in Luke’s use of phrases like εἰς ἀνάμνησιν and εἰς μνημόσυνον, which reflect the expiatory rituals of almsgiving and other practices in ancient Judaism. In the context of Luke, Jesus’ self-offering constitutes another cultic rite that memorializes God’s atonement on behalf of his people. Thus, atonement theology lingers in the underlying strata and assumptions in Luke, even though it might not find explicit articulation.

Schroder and Fitzmyer take a different tack and emphasizes Jesus’ dialogue with the thief on the cross where the thief realizes that he is receiving his just deserts, whereas Jesus, the innocent one, can save repentant sinners.\textsuperscript{804} Doble has argued that Luke does possess a \textit{theologia crucis} without necessarily invoking atonement theology.\textsuperscript{805} For him, Jesus is the δίκαιος who innocently suffers his fate and therefore receives vindication at the hand of God. Though interesting, these projects have hardly overturned the consensus view. At best they have undermined some of the confidence in the dominant view but have ultimately failed to supplant it. Probably the most supportive of Lukan atonement theology has been the recent work of David P. Moessner, but his voice has been a minority in the field.\textsuperscript{806}

Thus, far we have noted that the longer reading of Luke’s Last Supper sayings (Luke 22:19-20) contain a theology of atonement and since the blood of Christ is used to support a


theology of atonement, we can dismiss Ehrman’s argument that Acts 20:28’s reference to Christ’s blood obtaining his church speaks of something other than atonement. Some Lukan scholars are willing to grant the presence of atonement theology in these two instances, but still deny that this reflects Luke’s own soteriology. For instance, Joel Green says that Luke has inserted this material (Luke 22:19-20 and Acts 20:28) into his narrative in a “mechanical” way to the effect that it is disconnected from his theological viewpoint. According to him, both passages were adopted from Luke’s sources and do not represent Luke’s own thought. As a result, Green concludes that Luke has not “made this material more a part of his own thinking by integrating it into his style.” In other words, Luke 22:19-20 and Acts 20:28 are free-floating bits of tradition that Luke has assimilated but not integrated into the manner in which his works present the soteriological effects of Jesus’ death.

Is this an accurate understanding of Luke-Acts? Does the longer reading of the Last Supper simply represent an instance where alien or partially digested concepts have been indiscriminately adopted because of Luke’s allegiance to the traditions he inherited? In what

---

807 Green, “God’s Servant,” 4. Regarding Acts 20:28, he says Luke “appears to be merely parroting ancient phraseology. He has not developed this motif. He has not ‘owned’ it.” Cf., Ibid., 7; Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 70. On this point, Taylor is difficult to decipher, but he seems to utter a similar sentiment. See Taylor, Passion Narrative, 139.


809 Richard Zehnle “Salvific Character of Jesus’ Death in Lucan Soteriology,” TS 30, no. 3 (1969): 439-40. Green writes, “In summary, Luke was certainly aware of the interpretation of Jesus’ death as the basis for human salvation, but he did not choose to develop this notion as a critical or significant element either of his understanding of the crucifixion of Jesus or of his soteriology.” Green, “Message of Salvation,” 24.
follows, I will argue that the theology of the longer version of the Last Supper is not a free-floating relic of tradition, but a theological way of viewing Jesus’ death that is woven into the larger narrative of Luke-Acts and is therefore integrated into his text.810 In arguing this line of thought, I am not suggesting that Luke has developed a theology of atonement to the degree that Paul, Hebrews, or Mark does nor that Luke’s soteriology is completely defined by a theology of atonement. Luke has certainly emphasized the exaltation/resurrection of Jesus as Israel’s Davidic king more than Jesus’ death as a means of atonement, and what I say below is not meant to challenge that he emphasizes the resurrection more than Christ’s death. With this caveat in place, I contend that scholars ignore considerable evidence when they avouch that Luke has no theology of atonement or that the two places where it appears are simply portions that have been “mechanically” adopted by Luke.

To begin, Luke speaks of Jesus either forgiving or offering the “forgiveness of sins” more than any other New Testament author, which is surprising given that atonement theology seems more securely rooted in Matthew and Mark.811 Assertions like Green’s can only be made if we ignore the obvious, though latent, connection between the inauguration of new covenant at the Last Supper and YHWH’s promise in the new covenant prophecy to forgive Israel’s “iniquity and remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34). By positing Jesus’ death as the inauguration of the new covenant—elements that he has likely taken from tradition but still employed in his own

---


theological portrait—Luke emphasizes the new covenant blessings of forgiveness to those who repent and believe throughout his narrative. In fact, one can put it more forcefully: the characters in Luke-Acts are only able to speak of God’s offer of forgiveness on the basis of the new covenant’s inauguration, which the Last Supper identifies with Jesus’ sacrificial death.

5.C.3.a. Jesus’ Meals with Sinners

The theology of the Last Supper explains some of the unanswered questions that have lingered throughout the Gospel. As a meal, the Last Supper stands at the zenith of a series of meal scenes in Luke that have slowly been building towards the theological explanation provided in the Last Supper. In fact, Luke has recorded Jesus’ practice of eating at table more than any other Synoptic, and scholars have long noted that the meals Jesus had were tactile experiences of the kingdom’s arrival. As one author put it, eating a meal with Jesus “was both the offer in the present of the possibility of a new kind of relationship with God and with one’s neighbor, and an anticipation of the fellowship to be expected in the future in the consummated kingdom of God.” Thus, when Jesus shared a meal he was symbolically enacting the forgiveness and inclusion offered in the kingdom.

It is noteworthy that Jesus’ dinner guests were often the unsavory sort, earning Jesus the reputation of being “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Luke 7:34). To illustrate why Jesus received such criticism, Luke follows the charge with a story where Jesus dines at a Pharisee’s house. During the meal, a woman bearing the scornful opprobrium of “a sinner” came into the house and broke an alabaster jar of ointment over his feet.

---

812 It is quite likely that Jesus’ practice of eating meals was directly relevant to the social issues of Luke’s day. See Peter-Ben Smit, Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom: Eschatological Meals and Scenes of Utopian Abundance in the New Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 199.
(Luke 7:37). Jesus’ host is repulsed by the presence of such a notorious sinner whom Jesus permits to touch him. Despite causing such an offense to his host, Jesus uses this as an instance to make a theological point. He tells the story about a lender canceling the debts for two people who owed vastly different amounts to show that the one who was forgiven the greater debt would love more (Luke 7:41-3). At the end of the episode, Jesus turns to the woman and says, “Your sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:48). The pronouncement of forgiveness perplexes those at the table and they ask, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:49). The question, of course, is meant to raise the curiosity of the reader. Who does Jesus think he is anyway? Luke never answers the question in this episode, but he leaves the reader to mull the question for a while. What is left unanswered in this episode finds its explanation in a later meal, the Last Supper, where Jesus’ death inaugurates the new covenant, which brings forgiveness to Israel. Because Jesus is the one whose death inaugurates the new covenant and ushers in the fullness of the kingdom, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.

5.C.3.a. Post-Resurrection Meal in Emmaus

Not only do the earlier meal scenes with notorious sinners anticipate the theology of the Last Supper, but the post-resurrection meals also look back to the Last Supper. The first of the meal episodes begins when the risen, but unrecognized Lord happens upon two disciples traveling toward Emmaus deliberating over the Passion events.814 As Jesus joins the pair, the narrator explains that “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16). When Jesus appears ignorant regarding the crucifixion and resurrection reports, the two quickly inform him

814 I am not sure there is much reason to presume, as LaVerdiere does, that the two disciples should be understood as elders reminiscent of the ones who administered the covenant on Sinai. LaVerdiere, Dining in the Kingdom, 157. Nor is it particularly clear that one should see their departure to Emmaus as a loss of faith or an abandonment of Jesus. Ibid., 157, 161.
about the crucifixion, which not only exterminated Jesus’ life but also their hopes “that he was the one to redeem (ὁ μέλλων λυτροῦσθαι) Israel” (Luke 24:21).  

The account is thick with irony. The disciples who believe the crucifixion has extinguished the hope that Jesus could redeem Israel no longer recognize his physical appearance. In fact, the disciples openly display their incomprehension of Jesus’ identity because they describe him as just “a prophet mighty in deed and word” (Luke 24:19), but nothing more. To compound the irony, the disciples believe that Jesus is the one who is ignorant of the recent happenings in Jerusalem, but in reality they are ignorant. They fail to see what God was doing in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, their physical inability to recognize Jesus mirrors their spiritual myopia.

In response to their confusion, the risen Jesus does not dismiss their hopes as unfounded but instead affirms them through a different means. To put it in the words of the disciples, the risen Lord does not deny that he is the one to “redeem Israel,” but redefines how this would occur, namely, through death and resurrection. In fact, the risen Christ seems incredulous with the disciples on the road to Emmaus for failing to recognize this and responds to their quandary by saying: “Oh how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25-6). Jesus’ response does two things. First, it establishes Jesus as more than a prophet, which is all that the disciples had been able to say about him. Jesus is the Messiah, the one to whom the prophets pointed. Second, it presumes that the Old Testament prophecies necessitated the suffering of the Messiah. Therefore, his death was not the annihilation of their

---

815 I disagree here with those who believe λυτρόω simply speaks of liberation, because they fail to see that Luke continues to connect this to the necessity of death and resurrection and ultimately to the forgiveness of sins. E.g. Zehnle “Lucan Soteriology,” 439.
hopes for redemption, but following the course that the prophets predicted. Despite receiving a thorough lesson on biblical prophecy, the disciples still do not recognize Jesus, even though the Scriptural precedent for his death and resurrection was traced through the Old Testament, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets” (Luke 24:27). They implore the unrecognized Jesus to stay for the night, and he consents after demurring for a time.

The next scene is essential for seeing how this episode links up with the Last Supper. Seated at the table Jesus “took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them” (Luke 24:30). The setting and the actions of Jesus at the meal intentionally reduplicate Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper and cast this post-resurrection meal as a Eucharistic meal, even if the wine is absent. It is only at this point, at the breaking of the bread, when “their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight” (Luke 24:31). Their former inability to see and understand Jesus vanishes upon the breaking and blessing of the bread.

What occurs at the meal in Emmaus is something akin to Mark’s centurion gazing at Jesus on the cross. The reader will recall that, for Mark, it is only by gazing upon the cross that the human centurion understands Jesus’ identity as God’s Son. The same phenomenon is occurring here, only the event that provides the insight into Jesus’ identity and mission is not the

---

817 Compare Luke 22:19: “λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἐξάλαθεν καὶ ἐδόθην αὐτοῖς” with Luke 24:30: “λαβὼν τὸν ἄρτον εὐλόγησεν καὶ κλάσας ἐδόθη.” Several scholars concur that an intratextual allusion to the Last Supper is intentional here. See LaVerdiere, Dining in the Kingdom, 170; O’Toole, Luke’s Theology, 46-7, 202-3, 254-5; Jacques Dupont, “The Meal at Emmaus,” in The Eucharist in the New Testament, ed. Jean Delorme, trans. E. M. Stewart (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964), 116-9. Dupont bases his conviction upon the fact that the “breaking of bread (τᾖ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου)” in Acts 2:42 most certainly has the Eucharist in view. Thus, it is likely to follow suit here. Not all, however, are convinced that a Eucharistic meal is implied in the Emmaus account. E.g. Nolland, Luke 18:35-24:53, 1208; Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 556; and Leon Morris, The Gospel according to St. Luke: an Introduction and Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974; reprint, 1984), 340. Against the argument that the Emmaus disciples were not present at the Last Supper, one can respond by saying this is a literary work and the reader has been privy to the Last Supper events even if these two disciples were not. However, it seems that the close verbal parallels mandate that we see this as Eucharistic. The one other possibility is that it also alludes to the feeding miracle of Luke 9. The verbal parallel with Luke 9:16 is inexact as well (λαβὼν δὲ τοὺς πέντε ἄρτους καὶ τοὺς δύο ἰχθύας ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εὐλόγησεν αὐτοῖς καὶ κατέκλασεν καὶ ἐδίδου τοῖς μαθηταῖς). Even so, it is likely that all of the meal episodes are inherently connected as a symbol of the kingdom.
The disciples of Emmaus who cannot believe a redeeming Messiah could suffer such an ignominious death realize in the Eucharistic act of breaking bread that the crucified one was and still is the Messiah. By locating the moment of recognition at the point of breaking bread and not with Jesus’ recitation of Scripture, Luke reveals that it is not simply Scriptural precedent that necessitates Jesus’ death but the theological rationale provided at the Last Supper. The Scriptural antecedents were only “a preparation” for the understanding that was about to dawn, but not an efficient cause of it. As a result, the Eucharistic breaking of bread, which looks back to the Last Supper before the crucifixion provides the explanation for how Jesus can be a redeeming Messiah in spite of his death. The upshot of all of this is that the Emmaus episode has led the reader right back to scene of the Last Supper where Jesus once before broke bread and dispersed the wine, saying that these elements were symbolic of his coming death on behalf of his followers, which would inaugurate the new covenant. Thus, if we are going to understand Luke’s point in the Emmaus episode correctly, Jesus is not the redeeming Messiah in spite of his death but by means of his death.

The Emmaus episode also warrants a reassessment of the claim that Luke’s theology has deleted Mark’s notion of “ransom theology” from his account. For many, Luke’s failure to

---

818 The point of the episode, unlike the one that follows it, is not to provide apologetic evidence for the resurrection. Dupont, “Meal at Emmaus,” 109-10. Instead, the account is making the theological point that Jesus, not simply in spite of, but by means of death and resurrection, has fulfilled Israel’s hopes for redemption.

819 Thus, I think the conclusion that Carroll and Green take on this passage is still a half-way house towards penetrating into what Luke is actually communicating in this episode. About these verses, they write: “But rather than draw a bridge from Jesus’ death to this full-bodied notion of redemption, characters within Luke’s story understand the crucifixion as a denial of their hope that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel (Luke 24:19-21). Even though the narrator labels this view a profound misunderstanding, he goes on to show only that the cross was not a contradiction of such longings, not that the cross was directly instrumental in instigating God’s redemption” (Carroll and Green, Death of Jesus, 267-8).

820 Contra Caird, Gospel of St Luke, 258-9. Caird’s dismissal of the longer reading of the Last Supper causes him to connect the revelatory elements of the episode solely with the recounting of the Scriptural precedents.

821 Dupont, “Meal at Emmaus,” 120.

822 Ibid., 120-1. Dupont writes, “But in order that one may recognize him, contact must be made, and the great means of doing this is the breaking of bread.”
restate Mark’s saying to the effect that Jesus will give his life as a λύτρον (ransom) is decisive. However, the issue should not be decided simply on the basis of this one saying. Though Luke never uses the noun λύτρον, he does use other cognates of word throughout his Gospel to describe what God would do in and through Jesus. The opening lines of Zechariah’s Benedictus declares: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed (ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν) them” (Luke 1:68). Likewise, Anna the prophetess who greets the newborn Jesus in the Temple was delighted to see the infant Jesus for she was “looking for the redemption (λύτρωσιν) of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). For Luke, Jesus inaugurates the redemption of God’s people and he opens his Gospel by affirming that such hopes will be met in Jesus.

To be sure, λύτρωσις has a broad semantic range. One the one hand, it can simply speak of redemption as liberation from some kind of bondage without any kind of exchange being in view. On the other hand, it can describe the act of liberating someone or something by means of an exchange or purchase. It is difficult to know how Luke uses the word, but it is certainly possible that its use in Zechariah’s blessing connotes an exchange since the redemption that God is bringing through Jesus will result in the “forgiveness of sins” (Luke 1:77). The only other use of λύτρωσις in the New Testament does in fact employ this meaning. In the LXX, the word is most frequently used to capture the notion of an exchange where something is given in

---

823 BDAG, 606.
824 In this portion of the Benedictus, Zechariah is speaking directly about John the Baptist and says “… you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins” (Luke 1:76b-77). John himself would soon be “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3). Though it could be that the Benedictus’ allusion to the forgiveness of sins points simply to his future ministry of baptism, the Benedictus suggests that John will not be accomplishing this in his ministry, but will be witnessing to something that God will do in bringing salvation to his people. As such, it is has in view what will be developed later in the Gospel as well—which finds its fullest articulation in the Last Supper—and not just to John’s baptism.
825 “[Jesus] entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption (λύτρωσιν)” (Heb. 9:12).
order to purchase something else. If Luke was influenced by the LXX, then Luke’s usage of λύτρωσις likely implies that God’s liberation of his people will occur on the basis of an exchange or purchase, which he develops most explicitly in the Last Supper scene.

For much of the Gospel, the language of redemption fades into the background. However, it emerges again at the very end of the Gospel on the road to Emmaus, but this time Luke uses the verb form. The two despondent disciples tell the risen Christ “we had hoped that he was the one to redeem (λυτροῦσθαι) Israel” (Luke 24:21a). In fact, Luke had given such hopes to his readers in Zechariah’s Benedictus, so the disciples on the road to Emmaus articulate

---

826 The word is used to refer to purchasing a good many things. For instance, it is used for buying back property that had been sold to pay debts (Lev. 25:29, 48) or the necessary payment required to buy back from YHWH the firstborn of any womb (Lev. 18:16-7). Caleb’s daughter who is allotted land in the arid southern portion of the land asks for a λύτροσις “of water” (Judges 1:15). Psalm 49:8 (48:9 LXX) speaks about the human inability to give a “ransom,” λυτρόσης, for one’s life to buy off their iniquities. Psalm 130 again invokes the purchasing connotation: “O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem (λυτρώσει) Israel from all its iniquities” (Psalm 130:7-8; 129:7-8 LXX). Only two instances in the Old Testament fail to invoke the connotation of purchasing or paying something as a means of liberating it. Psalm 111:9 (110:9 LXX) speaks of God sending “redeemption (λύτροσις) to his people,” a usage which does not necessarily have the notion of an exchange or purchase in view. The final occurrence is Isaiah 63:4 where YHWH declares “For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work (λυτρώσεως) had come,” which refers to YHWH’s war against Israel’s enemies.

827 The verb form is only used two more times in the New Testament, and each time it implies a purchase or exchange. For example, Titus 2:14 says: “He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem (λυτρώσηται) us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.” In a similar manner, 1 Peter 1:18-9 says: “You know that you were ransomed (ἐλυτρώθητε) from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.”

Its use in the Pentateuch often involves the exchange of a payment in order to free something else. Exod. 13:13, 15; 34:20; Lev. 19:20; 25:25, 30, 33, 48-9, 54; 27:13, 15, 19, 20, 27, 28-9, 31, 33; Num. 18:15, 17. Other texts outside of the Pentateuch also carry the explicit connotation of an exchange: Psalm 49:7 (48:8 LXX); 49:15 (48:16 LXX); Isa. 52:3.

In several instances, the action of redeeming is set in parallelism with or infers the means by which sins are forgiven: Psalm 103:4 (102:4 LXX); Isa. 44:22-4; Psalm 130:8 (129:8 LXX); Dan. 4:27 (LXX). In Daniel 4:27 LXX, the translator assumes that the giving of alms will be a means of redeeming the king from his sins.

At other points, the explicit notion of exchange is absent, and the action of “redeeming” is more equivalent to rescuing someone from calamity. From slavery in Egypt: Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5 (LXX 13:6); 15:15; 21:8; 24:18; 2 Sam. 7:23; 1 Chron. 17:21; Neh. 1:10; Psalm 74:2 (73:2 LXX); 78:42 (77:42 LXX); 106:10 (105:10 LXX); Mic. 6:4. Of David’s rescue from adversity: 2 Sam. 4:9; 1 Kings 1:19; Psalm 7:2 (7:3 LXX); 31:5 (30:6 LXX); 32:7 (31:7 LXX); 34:22 (33:23 LXX); 55:18 (54:19 LXX); 59:1 (58:2 LXX); 69:18 (68:19 LXX); 144:10 (143:10 LXX). Of the political rescue of Israel under oppression: Esther 4:17 LXX; Psalm 25:22 (24:22 LXX); 26:11 (25:11 LXX); 44:26 (43:27 LXX); 77:15 (76:16 LXX); Hos. 7:13; Mic. 4:10; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 10:8; Isa 41:14; 51:11; 62:12; 63:9; Jer. 15:21; 31:11 (38:11 LXX). Protection from general adversity: Psalm 71:23 (70:23 LXX) 72:14 (71:14 LXX); 107:2 (106:2 LXX); 119:134 (118:134 LXX); 119:154 (118:154 LXX); 136:24 (135:24 LXX); Prov. 23:11; Isa. 35:9; 43:1, 14; Lam. 3:58; 5:8; Dan. 3:88 (LXX); 6:28 (LXX). Redemption from death: Hos. 13:14.
the very questions facing Luke’s readers: Can Jesus still be Israel’s redeeming Messiah if he
dies on the cross? Luke’s risen Jesus traces the hope for Israel’s redemption right through the
cross, indicating it was “necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into
his glory” (Luke 24:26). To put it simply, the risen Lord indicates the suffering and resurrection
of the Messiah are essential to accomplish the redemption of Israel, and this realization only
dawns at the moment of breaking bread.\textsuperscript{828} If the Emmaus episode does invite the reader to
return to the Last Supper scene, then I would suggest the Last Supper scene explains how Jesus
redeems Israel. His death would be the purchase or moment of exchange that would usher in the
new covenant era. If this explains Luke’s use of redemption in the Emmaus account, then certain
scholars err when they confidently conclude that Luke, simply by choosing not to use \textit{λύτρον} in
one place where Mark did, thus sanitized his account of ransom theology.

5.C.3.c. Post-Resurrection Meal in Jerusalem

Luke’s account of the resurrected Lord continues with one more scene in the Gospel.
The end of the Emmaus account transitions seamlessly into the next meal scene wherein the
Emmaus disciples return to Jerusalem to inform the eleven disciples. When they report their
encounter of the risen Lord, they announce that “he had been made known to them in the
breaking of the bread (ἐν τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου)” (Luke 24:35). Such an introductory statement
serves to keep the Emmaus account in view and therefore connects the next meal in Jerusalem
with what happened before at Emmaus. Furthermore, it reiterates the former point made to the
effect that it is the Eucharistic act of breaking bread—with its rearward focus on the content of

\textsuperscript{828} In light of this, I think Carpinelli misses the point when he believes that redemption and expiation are
entirely separate domains. Carpinelli, “My Memorial.” 80-2, 88. It is my conclusion that these are not exclusive
categories and are often wed together in Luke’s thought.
the Last Supper sayings—that allows one to penetrate into the mysterious nature of this Messiah.  

While the Emmaus disciples are recounting their prior experience of the risen Lord, Jesus appears again to those who were gathered. This time, instead of breaking bread, Jesus has a fish (Luke 24:42-3). At the end of this encounter with the resurrected Lord, Jesus again “opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45) and affirms that the death and resurrection of the Messiah follow the Scriptural expectations: “Thus it is written that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἄμαρτιῶν) is to be proclaimed (κηρυχθῆναι) in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-7). Though short, this quotation does two important things. First, it introduces the notion that forgiveness of sins is bound up with the Messiah’s suffering and resurrection. Second, it imparts to Jesus’ disciples the same role of proclamation that he had assumed in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of the Gospel and expands it to include the Gentiles.  

In Luke 4, Jesus read from Isaiah 61 to appropriate the Isaianic prophecies “He has sent me to proclaim (κηρύξαι) release (ἄφεσιν) to the captives” and “to let the oppressed go free (ἀφέσει)” (Luke 4:18) to himself. Jesus’ final appearance to the disciples imparts this role of proclamation to his followers and clarifies the nature of the ἄφεσις Jesus brings, namely, the

---

829 Some, unfortunately, only see the connection with the feeding miracles and not the Eucharistic connection. E.g. Parker, *Living Text*, 154; Poon, “Superabundant Table,” 229-30. It seems that Parker’s preference for the shorter text precludes him from seeing the natural connection with the longer text of Luke’s Last Supper present in the post-resurrection accounts. Poon notes that the disciples on the road to Emmaus would not have been present for the Last Supper. While this is an important historical point to make, it does not apply to the reader, who was privy to the Last Supper scene.  

830 Together these post-resurrection meals in which Jesus eats both bread in the first and fish in the second recall Jesus’ earlier feeding miracle where he miraculously multiples food for his listeners (Luke 9:10-17). Moloney, *Body Broken*, 109-110. In addition, this second appearance wherein Jesus dines on a fish makes an apologetic point about the physicality of his resurrection. The risen Jesus invites his disciples to touch and see him “for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39).  


forgiveness of sins. In essence, Jesus has bequeathed his ministry of the kingdom and the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins to his disciples.

At this point, if we take a step back and ask ourselves what passage has laid the theological groundwork for Jesus to pass his role of preaching about the kingdom and the forgiveness of sins on to his disciples, are we not directed back to the Last Supper? It was there that Luke’s unique version of the Last Supper discourse has Jesus saying, “I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom” (Luke 22:29). Jesus had given his disciples authority in the kingdom at the Last Supper, and this final meal scene follows up on this notion by explicitly endowing them with the responsibility of proclaiming the presence of the kingdom. In addition, the connection of Jesus’ death to the forgiveness of sins is theologically connected to the longer version of the Last Supper sayings which characterizes Jesus’ death as the event inaugurating the new covenant, the same covenant that would bring the forgiveness of sin. Moreover, let us not forget that the literary transition from Emmaus to Jerusalem hinged upon the realization that Jesus “had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:34), which again draws attention to the Emmaus account and ultimately the Last Supper. As a result, Luke’s account of the Last Supper provides the theological rationale for the commission that Jesus makes in this final meal scene.


If we turn to Luke’s second volume, Acts, we find the presupposition that the new covenant era has dawned, this time on the lips of the character Paul. Acts 13 contains one of the most developed summaries of Paul’s preaching in Acts. At the end of this sermon, Paul says “Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is
proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-9). Essentially, Paul is fulfilling the very commission that Jesus imparted to his disciples at the end of Luke since he is proclaiming the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus (Luke 24:46-7). However, there is one very important addition made in this passage. Paul contrasts the old covenant (“the law”) mediated by Moses with the forgiveness of sins now offered through Jesus. Though there is no explicit affirmation in the passage that the new covenant has been inaugurated, it is hard to imagine that anyone remotely familiar with Jeremiah’s promise of a new covenant would miss the theological assumption that Jesus constitutes the turning point in the eras. Israel’s former exile, which was punishment for breaking the Mosaic law, has ended. Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins, the promised state of affairs in the new covenant, has been made available.

This should be nothing new to the reader of Luke-Acts, for this is precisely what Luke laid out in the Last Supper sayings where Jesus’ death was described as the inaugurating sacrifice of the new covenant. In addition, it confirms that Jesus’ commission to the disciples in Luke 24:47 to proclaim “the forgiveness of sins” finds its ideological basis in the Last Supper’s affirmation that Jesus’ death inaugurates Jeremiah’s new covenant. Moreover, it indicates that we should see Luke’s frequent talk of the “forgiveness of sins” as indicative of the new covenant’s commencement.

While this is a small sampling of Luke-Acts, it nevertheless tells a different story than the one most scholars have been telling about Luke-Acts. Luke’s longer version of the Last Supper

---

833 Most of the commentary on these verses has been distracted by the question of whether the passage accurately reflects Paul’s teaching. E.g. Gerd Lüdemann, The Acts of the Apostles: What Really Happened in the Earliest Days of the Church (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 2005), 172-3; C. K. Barrett, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 1:649-52. Unfortunately, the historical questions have thrown exegesis off the scent. The real question should be how the author intends to use this quotation to advance his theological portrait of salvation history presented in both books.

834 Thus, those who suggest the “new covenant” ideology is foreign to Luke overlook what seems quite apparent in texts like the above. E.g. Ehrman, “The Cup, the Bread,” 578-9.
is not free-floating flotsam he has assimilated from tradition. To the contrary, Luke has intertwined the theological implications of the Last Supper into his larger story of God’s salvation of his people. Luke 24 and Acts 13 reveal that there are ideological connections between the Last Supper and the rest of Luke-Acts. Only the longer reading of Luke’s account of the Last Supper explains why the Messiah’s death would serve Israel’s redemption. Moreover, only the longer reading speaks to the inauguration of the new covenant, a theological presupposition that gives rise to Luke’s frequent references to forgiveness and the belief that the era of Israel’s culpability under Moses’ covenant had ended with Jesus (Acts 13). All of this indicates that the longer reading is likely authentic because it is deeply connected to the rest of Luke-Acts.

5.C.4. Conclusion

The evidence accumulated here does not mean that Luke’s soteriology simply reiterates what is present in Mark and Matthew. Scholars have long noted that Luke has different emphases than the other Gospels and focuses more on the resurrection and vindication than Jesus’ death.835 For Luke, the resurrection is the divine affirmation that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah. This much can be acknowledged without challenging what I have advanced thus far. What I wish to challenge is the deeply entrenched belief in much of Lukan scholarship that Luke’s longer reading of the Last Supper—even if deemed authentic—does not represent his theology or that atonement theology is altogether missing from his work. The atonement theology present in

835 Though I agree with Zehnle that the resurrection plays a vital role in Luke’s soteriology, I do not think Luke’s soteriology is completely located in the resurrection and not also in Jesus’ death. He writes, “For Luke, it is the glorification of Jesus as messiah that enables Him to be now a cause of salvation for men.” Zehnle, “Jesus’ Death,” 431. The necessity that Luke connects to both the cross and the resurrection means that one cannot locate God’s saving activity only in the resurrection. Carroll and Green label this an egregious “mistake” as well. Carroll and Green, Death of Jesus, 67. This is somewhat mitigated and perhaps compromised by Green and Baker’s conclusion to the effect that “…the means of salvation for Luke is the exaltation of Jesus.” Green and Baker, Recovering the Scandal, 73.
the Last Supper is not an aberration of Lukan theology but is rather bound up in Luke’s larger understanding of how God’s salvation has occurred through Jesus Christ.

To be sure, Luke’s soteriology is much broader than atonement. Steyn’s analysis of salvation in Luke captures the holistic nature of Lukan soteriology that contains two different dimensions. The first is “the well-being of the physical body,” which is demonstrated in Jesus’ miracles that remove physical suffering. This dimensions finds its fullest expression in the physical resurrection of Jesus where death itself is contravened. The second dimension is the “[s]piritual restoration” that comes “through the forgiveness/redemption of sins, through atonement and by entering the kingdom to eternal life.” Throughout Luke-Acts, the forgiveness of sins offered through Christ is an essential piece of salvation. Steyn synthesizes these two dimensions in order to construct “a more holistic approach” to Lukan soteriology. Such a combination is a robust articulation of Lukan soteriology that correctly situates atonement within the more encompassing orbit of his thought.

Luke’s affirmation that Jesus is the savior only occurs because Jesus is the one who has fulfilled (at least partially) the Jewish hopes for restoration. Because Luke has a sequel following his Gospel, he is able to affirm more forcefully than some of the other Gospels that Israel’s hopes for restoration had come to pass in and through Jesus. The Last Supper sayings, of course, affirm the inauguration of the new covenant, which was to reconstitute the relationship with YHWH. Acts records the fulfillment of other hopes for restoration. Shortly after the book begins, the divine Spirit descends upon Jesus’ followers in a tangible manner (Acts 2:1-4). Moreover, in Acts, the mission to the Gentiles begins in earnest. The eschatological expectation

837 Ibid.
that the Gentiles would come and worship Israel’s God occurs in the apostolic mission. Though Israel was still free to reject its Messiah, Luke draws the conclusion that Jesus is the expected one, the one sent to redeem Israel. Thus, for Luke, Jesus is the savior in Israel’s story, even if Israel chooses not to participate.

5.D. Conclusion

The analysis of the Last Supper sayings has yielded several important insights. In the context of Mark, the Last Supper discourse casts Jesus’ death in the light of the Passover festival. Though the Passover remembered YHWH’s past deliverance, the Last Supper anticipated a future rescue that was about to happen in and through Jesus, the eschatological arrival of the kingdom. The words spoken over the bread and the wine explain the nature and means of this deliverance, indicating that Jesus’ death would make atonement for the renewal of the covenant. This portrait, however, is not simply limited to the Last Supper discourse, for it finds corroboration in other places in Mark as well. The Passion predictions borrow the language of Israel’s exilic punishment to indicate that Jesus’ death would partake in Israel’s judgment when he was “betrayed into human hands” (Mark 9:31) and handed “over to the Gentiles” (Mark 10:33). Such a picture is also given in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus seeks to do the Father’s will and drink the “cup,” which often referred to God’s judgment. Finally, Mark’s crucifixion scene, densely packed with the awareness of Jesus’ identity flooding the centurion’s

---

840 Because Luke has clearly situated Jesus within the larger story of Israel, I think Green gets it slightly wrong when he locates salvation in the “salvation-as-transposition” motif. Luke-Acts is not simply identifying Jesus as the vindicated one, but as the one who was Israel’s expected Messiah who has advanced the eschatological calendar in significant ways, even if more remains to be fulfilled. Green, “Message of Salvation,” 27.

841 The wedge that many seek to drive between Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom and his vicarious death for others is non-existent if we put Jesus in his context. Contra Gorringe, God’s Just Vengeance, 81.
consciousness and the temple veil rending in two demonstrates that Mark believed the death of Jesus made a new way of relating to God possible: the covenant was renewed.

Matthew repeats many of Mark’s emphases but adds his own. Matthew elevates the eschatological importance of the death of Jesus, infusing the Last Supper scene with terminology indicative of the kingdom’s imminence, something which is also captured by his inclusion of resurrected saints being roused by an earthquake and entering Jerusalem. Most importantly, he corroborates the understanding that the allusion to the covenant sacrifice in Exodus 24:8 connoted the atoning implications found in Hebrews and later Targums by adding that Christ’s blood was “for the forgiveness of sin.” Moreover, Matthew’s redactional tendencies indicate that he has taken great care to make the death of Christ the event that acquires forgiveness of sin. While the reader of Mark might be left with the conclusion that John’s baptism had the power of procuring forgiveness, Matthew has made this the exclusive accomplishment of the cross. In addition, Matthew has chosen to employ the financial metaphor for sin more thoroughly than Mark, and the ransom saying, when set within such a context, makes perfect sense as depicting Jesus’ death as a form of transaction on behalf of others’ debts. Thus, Matthew, though adopting many of Mark’s theological emphases, has contributed his own insights in this regard, which further augments but does not displace the picture presented in Mark.

The longer reading of Luke’s Last Supper brought Jeremiah’s promise of the new covenant to the fore. This was the promise wherein God would transform his covenant partners. At the same time, the new covenant expected Israel’s sins to be forgiven. If Jesus’ death was to inaugurate the new covenant, then by implication, it was also the event that would result in the forgiveness of sins. Though many biblical scholars have balked at the notion of atonement theology being central to Luke’s theology, our analysis supported a different conclusion. Luke’s
Last Supper discourse is the crux of his theology of the cross, and this can be seen in the manner in which he keeps pointing the reader back to this particular text. The most important instance is the Emmaus road account where Jesus’ identity as the crucified yet redeeming Messiah is revealed, not through an exposition of Old Testament prophecies, but in the Eucharistic act of breaking bread. Though Luke offers a slightly different account of the Last Supper sayings, the theological implications are quite similar to what one finds in Mark and Matthew.

These assessments harmonize with the arguments of the previous two chapters. In them, I argued that the Synoptics identify Jesus as a saving figure because he inaugurates Israel’s restoration. If they see Jesus’ ministry within the larger story of Israel awaiting restoration, it only seems logical that they would also see his tragic death on the cross as an important element in light of these expectations. Such is precisely what one finds. All three of the Synoptics indicate that Jesus’ death was the means by which God renewed his covenant. In fact, they suggest more, namely, Jesus’ death renews this covenant by entering into solidarity with and bearing Israel’s exilic punishment. The end of Deuteronomy had given Israel two options: “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity” (Deut. 30:15). Death was the punishment for breaking the covenant. It is precisely this punishment that Jesus suffers under the hands of the Romans. His bearing of the covenant curses emancipated the covenant people from their sin. For this reason, the Last Supper sayings use sacrificial language to describe Jesus’ death, not simply to say that Jesus relinquished his right to life, but to say that in doing so he was taking on Israel’s exilic punishment.

At this point, it would be remiss to say that death has the final word in the Gospels, for such is not the case. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Resurrected life dominates the landscape. Against the backdrop of Israel’s hopes for restoration, the resurrection of Christ also finds its
place. In Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones (Ezek. 37:1-14), resurrection functioned as a metaphor of Israel’s coming restoration and her return to the land. For the Synoptics, what had once been a metaphor or a symbol had now become a literal experience of Israel’s Messiah. If the divine Spirit had breathed new life into Israel’s Messiah then the restoration of Israel had begun.

Because our analysis of the Gospels commenced from the vantage point of Israel’s story of covenant with YHWH, the exile, and the promises of restoration, we have come to a different conclusion about how the cross should be understood within the context of the Gospels than what Girardian soteriology allows. To what degree do the conclusions and interpretations here challenge a Girardian approach to salvation? The following chapter identifies the manner in which the hermeneutical stance adopted and the exegetical conclusions reached in this study differ from Girard and his followers. In fact, there will be several points that will require concession or reformulation on the part of Girardian theologians if they should continue to cite the Gospels for support. To these questions we now turn.
CHAPTER 6: ASSESSING THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GIRARDIAN SOTERIOLOGY

6.A. Evaluating Girardian Soteriology

After investigating the Last Supper sayings’ contributions to the soteriological implications of Jesus’ death in the Synoptic Gospels along with other passages dealing with the cross, it is time to return to Girard’s soteriology. In light of the exegetical analysis of the preceding chapters, it has become apparent that, despite Girard’s claim that the Gospels unequivocally support his thesis, the Synoptic Gospels actually challenge the current formulations of Girard’s soteriology and thereby preclude his ability to claim the entirety of the Gospels for support. This particular section summarizes several ways in which Girard’s soteriology differs from the hermeneutical and exegetical conclusions made in the previous chapters.

6.A.1. Girard’s Hermeneutics

In chapters 3 and 4, we observed that Girard’s hermeneutics proceeded from several dubious assumptions. First, instead of deriving the “state of deprivation” or the human need for salvation from the story the Gospels are telling, Girard constructs one from his theory of humanity’s origins. For Girard, human culture is founded upon the innocent victim who was unjustifiably executed in the original murder. In an effort to justify itself and remove its culpability, humanity has convinced itself that all such victims are worthy of their punishment.
According to Girard, this ideology governs mythological texts, and only the Gospels succeed in revealing the truth that such victims are innocent. Nevertheless, aside from a few oblique possibilities and some structural similarities, it is not clear that the Gospels presume the scapegoat mechanism as the “state of deprivation” that needs remedied for human salvation.

In fact, the Gospels presuppose a different “state of deprivation.” As chapters 3 and 4 argued, the Synoptic Gospels situate Jesus within the larger story of Israel and her restoration from exile, a story that began in the Old Testament and finds its culmination in the New Testament. Furthermore, the Gospels’ explicit dependence upon the prophetic texts—something which cannot be said of mythological texts—and their frequent allusions to the Jewish hopes for restoration indicate that the Synoptic Gospels believe the problem Jesus addresses is Israel’s lack of complete restoration from its exilic punishment, which was to bring blessing to the world. When the Synoptics herald Jesus as savior, they do so within the purview of this particular story and this particular “state of deprivation,” which does not appear in Girard’s soteriology.

Second, since Girard’s understanding of humanity’s need—as derived from his structural analysis of mythological and persecutory texts—determines how Christ functions as a savior, an external body of literature becomes the hermeneutical key for unlocking the New Testament’s claim that Jesus is the savior of humankind. At the core of Girard’s soteriology lies the assumption that the biblical texts are intertextually related to mythological texts. For him, a polemical exchange with mythology reverberates throughout the biblical narrative, which is especially true of the Passion account. Though the comparison between the Bible and mythology is a valiant and worthwhile endeavor in its own right, presupposing such a dialectical interchange unfortunately makes this polemical intertextuality govern the meaning of the biblical

---

842 He does qualify this claim, noting that not all biblical narratives are anti-myths. Nevertheless, he does admit that his exegesis presupposes a great degree of intertextuality vis-à-vis mythical texts. See Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 200-4.
text. In fact, it reduces the biblical narrative and the interpretation of the Passion to the subversion of mythology, which fails to acknowledge the many other things the biblical texts are trying to communicate.

In defense of his hermeneutic, Girard contends that, in conjunction with Christian tradition, he reads the Gospels from Christ backwards, thereby privileging the New Testament over the Old Testament.\(^{843}\) He thus claims that Christ functions as the hermeneutical key to the entire Bible. This is true regarding the relationship he presupposes between the two parts of the canon, but it certainly does not describe the entirety of Girard’s hermeneutical approach to the biblical canon. In Girard’s exegesis, his narrative of human origins and his interpretation of mythology govern and set the framework for his interpretation of the Gospels. To put it bluntly, Girard does not start with Christ as a saving figure and then work backwards into the Old Testament.\(^{844}\) Rather, Girard begins with his meta-theory of humanity in subjection to the scapegoat mechanism. This construct becomes the governing lens of the Bible more generally, but also dictates how Christ can be a savior more specifically.

For proof that this is the case, one only needs to trace the historical publication of Girard’s major works. The first of his major works, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961), developed his notion of mimetic desire, and the concept of mimetic desire is most often the first essential piece to understanding Girard’s soteriology.\(^{845}\) The second major work, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), drew from ethnology to explain that human culture was founded on the innocent murder, the cataclysmic effect of mimetic desire, and that natural human religion was

---

\(^{843}\) Girard, *Things Hidden*, 274-5.

\(^{844}\) I am not suggesting that this is what one must do in order to make Christ the center of salvation history. Even the approach I have taken here assumes that we need an understanding of the human problem before we can talk about how Jesus is a solution in that regard. The issue is the place from whence one derives this understanding of the human problem.

\(^{845}\) The original French version was published as René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).
nothing other than the deification of scapegoats. Only after these ideological precursors were in place did Girard go on to explain how the Gospels reveal the truth of the scapegoat in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1978). Despite what some of his followers like Alison contend, Girard’s soteriology begins with his narrative of human origins and the scapegoat mechanism as developed through ethnology and his reading of mythology. Since Girard never reads the Bible apart from mythological texts and since the nature of humanity’s problem is quintessentially enshrined in these texts, Girard’s interpretation of the Gospels cannot exist without its polemical relationship with mythology and its obfuscation of the scapegoat mechanism. Though one might be able to say that the cross is the hermeneutical key for interpreting mythology, the relationship is not unilateral for Girard and those who follow him. In fact, because the Gospels and mythological texts exist in a dialectical exchange for Girard, one could say mythology is as much a hermeneutical key for the Passion as the Passion is for mythology. The two are mutually explicatory.

The problem with this approach is that it imposes a polemical interchange between the Bible and mythology in places where biblical scholars have rarely drawn the battle lines and where one is hard pressed to find it. Certainly the Bible has places where it contravenes the metaphysical commitments of mythological texts and idolatrous practices, but Girard has placed the battle lines in the center of the Passion account. Consequently, this makes Girard’s soteriology contingent upon the dubious belief that the Passion accounts intentionally undermine mythology or at least his understanding of it. Furthermore, it allows a group of texts, which are probably not in the Gospel writers’ purview to the degree and in the manner that he presupposes,

---

to set the agenda for how Jesus functions as a Savior. By simply dismissing this problematic presupposition, one can seriously jeopardize the warrant of Girard’s soteriological claims.

Girard’s presupposition of a polemical relationship between the biblical texts and mythology leads to a third problem, namely, Girard offers some dubious interpretations of select biblical passages in order to ground his soteriology more firmly in the biblical texts. For example, in chapters 3 and 4 we noted that Isaiah 40:3-4 anticipates God’s work of restoring Israel from exile when the author writes that a “… voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.” As previously noted, most Old Testament scholars have interpreted the imagery of making a “way” and a “highway” in the wilderness as a reference to the new exodus, when God would lead his people back from the exile. Even ancient readers of Isaiah 40 interpreted it as heralding a return from exile, so this is not simply a matter of modern interpreters taking the text in a new direction. 848 In addition, the Synoptic Gospels draw upon this expectation of God’s intervention on Israel’s behalf, to situate the ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist, establishing their work as the culmination of Israel’s hopes for restoration from exile. The consensus of modern biblical scholarship has taken Isaiah 40 and its adoption by the Gospel writers as an anticipation of God’s restoration of his people.

Despite the explanatory value of this interpretation of Isaiah 40, especially within its historical context, Girard believes the common scholarly interpretation misses the point because,

---

848 Consider Baruch 5:5-7, which reads, “Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.” Cf. Pss. Solomon 11:4.
underneath it all, he believes the passage must be talking about a mimetic crisis. When Isaiah writes that “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain,” Girard believes this can only be fully understood as a reference to the initial stages of the mimetic crises where the community embarks on a war against everyone.849 Regarding these verses from Isaiah he writes, “… I think it is necessary to see there an image of those mimetic crises whose essential feature is the loss of differences, the transformation of individuals into doubles whose perpetual conflict destroys culture.”850 In other words, the flattening of the mountains and valleys does not depict a future rebuilding of a highway to allow the exiles to return to their homeland but is rather a symbolic picture of the erasure of difference among a community at conflict.851

Such an interpretation, though creative, strains credulity for the immediate literary and even presumed historical context speaks of the end of exile and Israel’s ensuing restoration. Whatever in the context actually indicates this is the beginning phase of a mimetic crisis other than Girard’s presupposition that the Bible is engaged in diffusing the scapegoat mechanism? The geographical imagery is much more easily connected with the processes of building a road for the returning exiles than with a mimetic conflict, though Girard is certainly on firmer footing when he identifies the suffering servant’s death in Isaiah’s final servant song as the culmination of a mimetic crisis.852 Nevertheless, for Girard to suppose that the opening verses of Isaiah 40...
must have a mimetic crisis in view cannot be supported, even if the final servant song culminates in one.

Girard is also aware that Isaiah 40:3-5 establishes the trajectory of the Gospels and Jesus’ role as a Savior, and this might explain Girard’s efforts to inscribe mimetic rivalry into the text of Isaiah 40. According to him, when the Gospels utilize Isaiah 40:3-5 to situate Jesus’ ministry, they imply that Jesus will inaugurate another “mimetic cycle” like Isaiah’s suffering servant. Unfortunately, Girard misses a vital opportunity to understand Israel’s hopes for restoration in Isaiah and how those hopes become the leitmotif for the Gospels themselves. Instead of grasping this insight, Girard’s controlling narrative of mimetic rivalry has conscripted Isaiah 40 to support his presupposition that the Bible unveils the mimetic contagion. As a result, he has likely disinterred a mimetic conflict where none actually existed in the biblical text.

A similar effect can be seen in Girard’s interpretation of the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). Girard’s reading of the parable is placed within his larger word study of σκάνδαλον in the New Testament. Though σκάνδαλον and its cognates are absent from the Lukan version of the parable, the allusion to someone stumbling over a stone (Luke 20:18) allows him to link it with his larger discussion. Believing that many misunderstand this theme, he states that the σκάνδαλον or the stone of stumbling can be equated with the mimetic conflict. For Girard, the use of σκάνδαλον in the Bible refers to the model of one’s mimetic desire who simultaneously functions as the “obstacle” prohibiting one’s acquisition of a particular desire, hence the stumbling effect. This very obstacle, the one that becomes the victim, is eventually deified if the entire process runs unhindered. Thus, Luke’s

---

853 Ibid., 30.
854 Girard, Things Hidden, 416.
855 Ibid., 421.
reference to the stone of stumbling supposedly takes up this very theme according to Girard. He finds further confirmation of his conclusion in the violent murder of the son at the hands of the wicked tenants, thus making the entire parable one “that reveals the founding murder.” According to Girard, the quotation of Psalm 118 at the end of the parable confirms that the passage has the foundational murder in view:

The quintessential scandal is the fact that the founding victim has finally been revealed as such and that Christ has a role to play in this revelation. That is what the psalm quoted by Christ is telling us. The entire edifice of culture rests on the cornerstone that is the stone the builders rejected. Christ is that stone in visible form. That is why there can be no victim who is not Christ, and no one can come to the aid of a victim without coming to the aid of Christ. Mankind’s failure of intelligence and belief depends upon an inability to recognize the role played by the founding victim at the most basic level of anthropology.

Thus, for Girard, since the parable contains an unjust lynching and a reference to the stumbling typical of the mimetic crisis, it must speak of humankind’s inability to recognize its murderous nature. For him, the passage constitutes another way in which the Gospels reveal the nature of humanity to us by exposing the scapegoat mechanism.

Schwager’s exegesis of the same parable is a bit more cautious. He still follows Girard in emphasizing the passage’s emphasis upon rivalry with God, but he locates the emphasis in a different place. Rather than seeing the reference to stumbling as suggestive of the mimetic conflict, Schwager focuses on the theme of rejection and vindication, making this pattern paradigmatic for the Gospel. For Schwager though, the citation of Psalm 118 serves to demonstrate that the “collective blindness” of the Jerusalem leadership will advance “the process

---

856 Ibid., 428.
857 Ibid., 429. There is an interesting alteration in how one is united with Christ here. No longer is it by means of faith, but it occurs through being a victim or helping a victim like Christ. Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 168, 205; idem, *Sacrifice*, xi; and idem, “Are the Gospels Mythical?,” 28.
858 Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 114-5.
of revelation.” In other words, the rejection by the Jerusalem leadership will be the means by which God reveals humanity’s bent towards violence.

Though Girard and Schwager offer intriguing observations about this passage, both of them offer incomplete interpretations in comparison with what has been advanced in former chapters. Their exegesis of the passage is unconvincing for several reasons. First, the vineyard’s symbolization of Israel is ignored and there is no correlation between the servants being sent with God’s former emissaries, the prophets, though this part is present in Schwager. Second, equating the stone of stumbling in Luke and Matthew with the mimetic conflict, as Girard does, is overextending the implications of the imagery. Though Girard is aware of the Old Testament passages that are likely being alluded to here, he fails to see the connection the passage makes between the “stone” and the temple itself, which we identified in chapter 3. For Girard, the stumbling stone can serve no other purpose than an allusion to the mimetic crisis. Third, both fail to see the passage’s connection with the temple and the implications that Jesus’ community will now function as some kind of new, spiritualized temple. Though I can agree with both that the passage is about the rejection of the son, the text has wider implications that become visible only when read against the background of Israel’s hopes for restoration, one of which was the reconstruction of the temple of YHWH.

Again, Girard’s interpretation of this parable reveals that one’s presupposed soteriological narrative determines how one interprets select passages. When Girard’s anthropological narrative is presumed to be the operative “story behind the story,” subtle allusions to elements of the mimetic crisis can be found in something as ambiguous as a

---

859 Schwager, Scapegoats, 141.
860 Ibid., 140-1.
861 Rather threatening here is Schwager’s threat of a “collective delusion” in the academic world that does not agree with his conclusions. He insinuates that modern scholars who disagree with the Girardian thesis are still participating in the rejection of Jesus like the Jewish leadership was doing in this pericope. Ibid., 138.
stumbling stone. While I do not deny that the parable expects the future rejection of the son (i.e. Jesus), I suggest that when the passage is read in light of the story of Israel awaiting restoration, Jesus’ comments reveal that his followers will function as a fulfillment of Israel’s hopes for a new eschatological temple. When the passages of the Gospels are read in light of the larger story of Israel, the interpretations appear much more credible and historically rooted in the Jewish world of the first century.

The same can be said for Girard’s articulation of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom. Instead of seeing the Kingdom from the vantage point of the Jewish hopes for restoration, Girard forces the proclamation of the Kingdom into, what appears to be, a foreign mold. For Girard, the Kingdom of God is the antithesis of the Kingdom of Satan, and, with his demythologized notion of the demonic realm, the Kingdom of Satan is the self-perpetuating system of violence founded upon “the unanimous and spontaneous murder of a scapegoat.”

Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom is therefore the announcement regarding the attenuation of the scapegoat mechanism’s power because the exposure of its principles will render it ineffective.

Girard’s most complete definition of the Kingdom puts it thusly: “The Kingdom of God means the complete and definitive elimination of every form of vengeance and every form of reprisal in relations between men.” Ultimately, this is “the Kingdom of love” which is the converse of violence and murder that typifies the Kingdom of Satan. To refuse to enter the kingdom “… means refusing the knowledge that Jesus bears—refusing the knowledge of violence and all its works.”

---

862 Girard, Scapegoat, 187.
863 Ibid., 189-90.
864 Girard, Things Hidden, 197.
865 Ibid.
866 Ibid., 208.
proclamation of the Kingdom is an invitation to a nonviolent way of living in accordance with God. 867

Now, Girard is not wrong to suggest that entering the Kingdom of God would constitute the way of love or that it would call us to relinquish our desires to seek vengeance. The Sermon on the Mount does as much. Nevertheless, Girard errs when he reduces the pluripotent symbol of the kingdom into being solely the privation of violence and presence of love. The Kingdom is certainly this, but it is much more in the Gospels. The arrival of the Kingdom, as noted in chapters 3 and 4, takes up Israel’s story of God as King. As such it would have spoken not simply of an invitation away from violence, but a recognition that God was about to make good on his hopes for restoration. The coming of the Kingdom was about more than humans acting differently. It was about God renewing his covenental relationship with his people and re-gathering them to himself. 868 Nevertheless, by adopting a view of the Kingdom that simply juxtaposes itself to the scapegoat mechanism, Girard’s notion of the Kingdom unfortunately lacks these dimensions that seem to be bound up with the connotation of the Kingdom in the first century and in the Gospels.

Investigating Girard’s exegesis of these selected passages and themes reveals that the larger narrative one presupposes when reading the Gospels governs how particular passages and symbols are interpreted. As observed in the aforementioned examples, Girard’s decision to read the Gospels vis-à-vis mythological texts has led him to overlook the ways in which the Gospels retell the story of Israel, not as an exodus from mythological delusion to revelation, but from

---

867 One can also wonder whether Girard’s assertion that Jesus’ self-identification as “Son of man” is rooted in Ezekiel not Daniel is an intentional effort to remove Jesus from the potentially violent associations the kingdom of God has in Daniel. Ibid., 207.
868 Girard is right that the Kingdom arrives at a particular point in history, to a Jewish people who had been “prepared … by the Old Testament to throw themselves into the great adventure of the Kingdom” (Ibid., 201, original emphasis not included). The question is precisely in what this preparation consists.
exile to restoration. In a few of these instances, particularly with the interpretation of Isaiah 40, it has resulted in an unfortunate distortion of the text to the point that Girard introduces mimetic crises in places where they are not apparent. Thus, hermeneutical presuppositions are not inconsequential. They run the risk of imposing alien meaning as much as they offer the potential of unveiling the text’s meaning.

6.A.2. Girard’s Thought

In addition to Girard’s problematic presuppositions governing his exegesis, the previous chapters, especially chapter 5, have identified how the Synoptics see the death of Jesus effecting salvation. On several occasions we have seen that the Gospels challenge and undermine the validity of some assertions essential for Girard’s soteriology. In what follows, I identify three areas where the exegesis of the former chapters challenges core tenets of Girardian soteriology.

6.A.2.a. Sacrificial Language

To begin, the analysis of the Last Supper sayings has shown that sacrificial language is more constitutive of the Gospels than Girard allowed, at least in his earlier formulations. In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard claimed, “The rare examples of sacrificial language can be taken as metaphorical in view of the absence of any specific theory of sacrifice comparable to that of the Epistle to the Hebrews or the range of theories that develop later.”869 The previous analysis of the Last Supper sayings has called this assertion into question. We have seen that the Last Supper sayings do sketch Jesus’ death with sacrificial language and that when they do so, especially in the case of Matthew, they appear to be operating with the

---

869 Ibid., 243.
atoning logic present in Hebrews. Thus, the initial distance that Girard placed between the Gospels and Hebrews does not exist.

At this point, my assessment differs from William Newell’s analysis of Girard, who also argued that Christian theology was more sacrificial than Girard allowed. However, to support his disagreement, he leaned exclusively on the book of Hebrews: “The hole we perceive in Girard’s hypothesis is that rendering Jesus’ death non-sacrificial does not jibe with the rest of the New Testament, especially Hebrews 10, and with tradition.”870 Though Newell disagrees with Girard’s perspective on Christianity, he still believes that the Gospels are different from the book of Hebrews, writing: “… the Gospels do not define the death as a sacrifice, they offer us a phenomenology of it.”871 In another place, he writes, “Nowhere in the gospels will one find a theory of sacrifice as one finds in the Epistle to the Hebrews.”872 On this point, Newell’s analysis falls short. As we have seen, the Last Supper sayings do not simply offer a “phenomenology” of sacrifice but define Jesus’ death as a covenant sacrifice by using language allusive of Exodus 24:8. Moreover, as we have argued, the covenant sacrifice in the Targums understood the covenant sacrifice as atoning, which is the same way it was understood in Hebrews. When Matthew adds the phrase, “for the forgiveness of sins,” to his allusion to the covenant sacrifice, we are in the theological orbit of the Targums and Hebrews. Thus, the alleged difference that Girard and Newell identify between the Gospels and Hebrews actually vanishes upon closer inspection of the Last Supper sayings.873

870 William Lloyd Newell, Desire in René Girard and Jesus (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 159; see also 163, 181, 220.
871 Ibid., 159.
872 Ibid., 181.
873 Newell does cite the Last Supper sayings in parentheses at one point but fails to elucidate their significance and reiterates the centrality of Hebrews in the sacrificial theology of the New Testament. Ibid., 173-4, 189, 194.
Though Girard initially opposed the language of “sacrifice” as a means of categorizing Jesus’ death in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, he has since made a significant adjustment by conceding that Jesus’ death can be called a “sacrifice,” even though he has carefully qualified what he means by adopting such language. His adoption of sacrificial language turns upon “a distinction between sacrifice as murder and sacrifice as renunciation,” with the latter being the only permissible manner of applying the term to Christ’s death. Girard further defines the appropriate use of “sacrifice” as “a movement toward freedom from mimesis as potentially rivalrous acquisition and rivalry.” It is this definition that he has continued to uphold in *Evolution and Conversion* where he says there is a difference between “sacrifice as murder” and “sacrifice as the readiness to die in order not to participate in sacrifice as murder.” In this same work, he further augments the distinguishing features of the acceptable form of sacrifice by saying that there is a “difference between the archaic sacrifice, which turns against a third victim the violence of those who are fighting, and the Christian sacrifice which is the renunciation of all egoistic claiming, even to life if needed, in order not to kill.” In fact, he claims there is actually “no non-sacrificial space,” but only a transition from one form of sacrifice to the other.

Nevertheless, even though Girard has become more amenable to applying sacrificial language to Christ’s death, he still opposes the kind of thought that would connect sacrifice with atonement because atonement would involve turning some form of violence “against a third victim” who would bear punishment or expiate sins on behalf of another. Thus, regarding the

---

874 One of the earliest statements in this regard is Girard’s essay, “Mimetische Theorie und Theologie,” 15-29. This article originated in French and was later collected in René Girard, *Celui par qui le scandale arrive* (Paris: Brouwer, 2001), 63-82. The acceptance of the term “sacrifice” is most apparent in *Evolution and Conversion*, 215.
876 Ibid.
878 Ibid.
879 Ibid., 216.
ability to describe Christ’s death as a sacrifice of atonement, it is likely that his earlier assertion would still obtain: “The rare examples of sacrificial language [in the Gospels] can be taken as metaphorical in view of the absence of any specific theory of sacrifice comparable to that of the Epistle to the Hebrews or the range of theories that develop later.”

The former analysis of the Last Supper sayings suggest there is more to the sacrificial language employed to describe Christ’s death than just a refusal to capitulate to the human penchant for murder or mimetic rivalry. Certainly Girard is right that Jesus freely renounced his claim to life, but he is wrong to say it was nothing more in the Gospels. As explained in chapter 5, the language of Matthew and Mark’s Last Supper discourses invokes the wording of the covenant sacrifice on Sinai (Exod. 24:8) to signify the soteriological value of Jesus’ death. Matthew’s has especially made Jesus’ death the means by which forgiveness is acquired and such is possibly implied in Luke’s Gospel as well. Moreover, when the Last Supper is read alongside of other passages like the ransom saying and the predictions of Jesus’ death which use language reminiscent of Israel’s exilic punishment to depict Jesus’ death, one can see that the sacrificial language means more than Jesus relinquishing his claim to life. Instead, the sacrifice involves Jesus entering into and experiencing Israel’s exilic punishment in order to bring restoration.

Not only does the exegesis of the Last Supper and supporting passages challenge Girard, it also challenges those who have adopted his interpretation of the Gospels even if they developed his thought in new directions. For example, one can agree with theologians like Hamerton-Kelly who see the Last Supper as a reversal of traditional sacrifice where “instead of

---

881 Contrary to Schwager, the interpretation of the “kingdom of God” as a revelation of God’s benevolent nature does not need to limit the interpretation of these sayings. If the kingdom is understood in light of restoration theology, the inauguration of the kingdom is not juxtaposed to a notion of Christ’s death as atonement. See Schwager, “Christ’s Death,” 111.
the worshiper giving to the god, the god is giving to the worshiper."\textsuperscript{882} Certainly, the covenant sacrifice of Jesus results from the divine initiative, but Hamerton-Kelly fails to see that Jesus as the covenant sacrifice provides atonement for his followers in the process. In the same vein, our analysis has shown that Bruce Chilton errs when he writes that the "‘blood’ and ‘body’” of the Last Supper do not need to be “identified with Jesus’ death.”\textsuperscript{883} Chilton’s assertion that the Last Supper represents the moment at which Jesus made sharing meals together a replacement of the Temple cult is not only quite speculative, it cannot be supported by the evidence in the Last Supper sayings themselves. As we have seen, the allusions present in the passages depict Jesus as the covenant sacrifice. Jesus is not substituting a meal for the Temple cult; he is substituting himself. Moreover, our analysis of Luke’s account of the Emmaus road encounter has demonstrated that the Last Supper sayings provide the essential insight for understanding Jesus as a dying yet still redeeming Messiah. We cannot fully understand the importance of the Last Supper unless we see it as a meal that establishes Jesus as the covenant sacrifice that inaugurates Israel’s restoration.

Moreover, one cannot play the Synoptics against one another, as some of Girard’s followers do. Some Girardians treat Luke as the authoritative interpreter of the Synoptic tradition whose omission of the ransom saying should purportedly dictate how one interprets both Luke’s Last Supper discourse and the soteriology of Mark and Matthew who do include the ransom saying.\textsuperscript{884} As chapter 5 explains, it is unwise to put too much weight on Luke’s absence of the ransom saying, for he appears to be following a different source. Moreover, when he does insert his version of the saying after the Last Supper, his specific variation of the saying actually points the reader back to the Last Supper to understand the kind of service that Jesus would do.

\textsuperscript{882} Hamerton-Kelly, \textit{Gospel of the Sacred}, 44.
\textsuperscript{883} Chilton, \textit{Feast of Meanings}, 68. He is followed here by Heim, \textit{Saved from Sacrifice}, 232.
\textsuperscript{884} E.g. Williams, \textit{Bible, Violence, and the Sacred}, 202; Bartlett, \textit{Cross Purposes}, 212.
for his people. Thus, the service is interpreted in light of the Last Supper saying and not vice versa. Finally, to use Luke to suppress any kind of atonement theology in Mark or Matthew is to overlook the fact that Mark and Matthew are independent works in their own right. While Luke needs to be granted freedom in presenting his own portrait of Jesus, one should not use Luke to fetter the theological voices of Mark and Matthew.

Finally, one cannot dismiss the theological implications by assuming that the New Testament’s use of “sacrificial language” is simply there in order for its subversion. Contrary to some of Girard’s followers, it is not simply a necessary bridge to carry people from a deficient understanding of human culture to a revelation of its vicious origins. The analysis of chapter 5 has confirmed this. To summarize, the Gospels depict Jesus’ death as a sacrifice in order to explain that his death will benefit his followers by atoning for sin and ushering in the age of restoration. If the sacrificial language were only utilized to subvert the sacrificial logic, it is entirely incumbent upon those who make this assertion to prove this is the case since sacrificial logic was commonplace in the first century. Thus, if the Gospel writers were to use sacrificial language to subvert such ideology, they would have to make themselves overtly clear to avoid any confusion on the part of the reader. From what I can tell, there is nothing in the Gospels constituting an intentional effort to undermine sacrificial theology that would have been perceived by a first century reader. All indicators suggest they were working with and presupposing such logic.

---

885 For many Girardian authors, the “sacrificial language” is a necessary accommodation in order to move people beyond its reality. E.g. Heim, Saved from Sacrifice, 13; Williams, Bible, Violence, and the Sacred, 223-4. If this is the case, then one needs to be able to provide criteria for separating endorsements of sacrificial logic from rejections of sacrificial logic. At present, none have been developed, except an a priori commitment to the Gospels as documents that intentionally subvert such thinking.

886 One can look here to the martyr stories of 2 and 4 Maccabees, which ascribe some kind of atoning value to the unjust deaths of the Jewish martyrs.
6.A.2.a. The Cross and Causality

Girard and his followers have also contended that the cross is solely the product of human violence, which means that God cannot be credited or associated with the violence at the cross in any way. After all, if the cross were simply the result of a mimetic crisis, then humans would be the only culpable party. Girard affirms on multiple occasions that the Gospels portray God the Father apart from violence and therefore innocent of the cross’s violence. For example, on one occasion he writes: “If we keep to the passages that relate specifically to the Father of Jesus, we can easily see they contain nothing which would justify attributing the least amount of violence to the deity.” According to Girard, any notion that God participated in the crucifixion of the Son “appears contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the Gospels.” If there is any way in which God contributes to Jesus’ death it is simply this: “There is no other cause for his death than the love of one’s neighbour lived to the very end, with an infinitely intelligent grasp of the constraints it imposes.” In one of his most direct statements on the causality of the cross, he writes: “Neither the son nor the Father should be questioned about the cause of this event, but all mankind, and mankind alone.” Thus, Girard explicitly dismisses any role that the Father or the Son might play in the crucifixion other than the choice to love. In short, it seems that Girard wants to posit God with willing a particular end, namely, the dissolution of the scapegoat mechanism, without willing or causing the means to that particular end, the cross. Certainly these assertions are in keeping with Girard’s desire to see God freed from violence, but it deserves to be asked whether this accurately reflects the Gospels like he avouches.

---

887 Girard, Things Hidden, 182; cf. 189.
888 Girard, I See Satan, 21; cf. idem, Things Hidden, 214. In the latter text, Girard contrasts his position with the “usual writings on the subject” wherein “the death of Jesus derives … from God and not from men....”
889 Girard, Things Hidden, 211.
890 Ibid., 213.
The previous chapter has given several reasons to question Girard’s ability to claim the Gospels as support in this regard. Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane indicates that the ensuing events are the Father’s “will” (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42), and Jesus consents to the Father’s will by accepting the path of the cross. Moreover, if the “cup,” which Jesus must drink is symbolic of God’s judgment, then the Father’s will is not simply the salvation of humanity but accomplishing this salvation via the cross as an atoning act. Though good-intentioned theologians aver God is never associated with the violence of the cross, the Gospels suggest a more complicated picture, especially in Gethsemane.

Probably the most formidable example in this regard is the intentional change that was introduced into the citation of Zechariah 13:7 where Jesus says, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27). As noted in the previous chapter, the LXX and MT both have an impersonal sword striking the shepherd, but the Gospels’ citation has significantly altered the subject of the sentence to make God the actor and hence grant him a role in the cross, even its violent aspects.891 Although this passage does not delete the culpability of those crucifying Jesus, it does obviate theologians’ ability to say that the Gospels never portray God involved—however one might understand this particular involvement—in the violence of the cross. It is perhaps ironic that in a book whose title alludes to the kind of language present in this very verse, *Stricken by God?*, not a single one of Girard’s followers addresses this particular verse, though there are multiple claims throughout that divine “violence” is absent from the New Testament.892

---

891 The nature of the Father’s role in this regard will be sketched later. At this point it is sufficient to note that this is a critique of Girardian theology, which deletes any relationship between the Father and the violence of the cross.

892 Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin, eds., *Stricken by God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). For the claim of “violence” being absent from the New Testament picture of the divine, see Northey, “The Cross,” 366. The only author to even refer to Jesus’ quotation of Zech. 13:7 is N.T. Wright—a person that cannot be categorized as a Girardian—who simply suggests the verse is an authentic
In addition, the former analyses suggest that the “necessity” the Gospels find in the cross differs from how Girardian soteriology typically explains it. Following Girard, Alison contends that when the New Testament defines the cross as “necessary”—which is phraseology peculiar to the Lukan presentation of the cross—the “Gospels do not attempt to attribute this ‘necessity’ to anything in God….” For him, the violence of the cross is entirely “anthropological” in its origin. Because human culture is captivated by the scapegoat mechanism, the crucifixion must necessarily result. According to Alison, the only “theological reason” behind the cross is that it occurs simply “so that the Scriptures be fulfilled.…” This fulfillment of Scripture, however, does not mean “that there is some divine plan to kill Jesus” because it is simply speaking about the human penchant for death, especially of those who challenge cultural order. Schwager too, explained the “necessity” of the cross as a result of humanity’s hatred for the divine, which could only be broken by the divine forgiveness offered at the cross. For both, the necessity of the cross lies within humanity rather than within God.

However, trying to limit the “necessity” of the cross to human nature—at least as it is understood in the Girardian theory—and Old Testament prophecies still does not accurately reflect the presentation in the Synoptics, especially when the Emmaus episode is taken into account. See Wright, “The Reasons for Jesus’ Crucifixion,” 127, 137. The title of the book was likely directed at a particular reading of Isaiah 53:4 that indicates the servant was “struck down” by God, but failing to engage Zechariah 13:7 in the context of the Gospels is necessary to prove the point.

Alison, Being Wrong, 171; cf. Heim, Saved from Sacrifice, 114. Even if this necessity were only human in origin, this would not mandate a Girardian soteriology. One could revise penal theories of the cross to do something quite similar. For instance, a proponent of a penal theory of the cross, which would be more in line with the exegesis of the Gospels that we have covered thus far, could agree with a Girardian that God can forgive without exacting some kind of retribution from humanity. In a similar fashion, they could say that humanity, due to its demands for justice and retribution, would not believe that God truly forgave them unless God offered to take the punishment in their place. Though undeveloped, Dunnill wonders if perhaps humanity needs a sign of sorts to believe in forgiveness, but this does not originate with God, but with humanity. See Dunnill, Sacrifice and the Body, 197.

Alison, Being Wrong, 171.

Ibid.

Schwager, Scapegoats, 190-200.
account. On the road to Emmaus the unrecognized Jesus asks the perplexed disciples, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). The risen Jesus’ recounting of the Old Testament prophecies fails to bring awareness of Jesus’ identity, which indicates that the theological necessity for the crucifixion is more than simply fulfilling Scripture, contrary to Alison’s proposal, though this is certainly a part of it. It is not until Jesus participates in the Eucharistic act of breaking bread that the disciples understand why it was “necessary” for the Messiah to die in order to redeem Israel. For the reader of Luke, the Emmaus episode’s emphasis on the Eucharistic act of breaking bread is a direct allusion to the Last Supper, which reminds one that Jesus’ death is the sacrifice that inaugurates the new covenant. Therefore, the theological dimension behind the necessity of the cross cannot be limited to simply fulfilling prophecy, even for the Gospel of Luke. The texts suggest that, more than just fulfilling prophecy, the theological necessity behind the cross requires Jesus’ death as the means by which God will redeem his people from sin, which is precisely what the Last Supper sayings reveal.

Other followers of Girard attempt to distance God from the violence of the cross by arguing that only Jesus’ opponents believe his death will be redemptive. For example, Heim writes: “The Gospels make clear that it is Jesus’ antagonists who view his death as a redemptive sacrifice, one life given for many.”\footnote{Heim, Saved from Sacrifice, 125.} Hardin, who follows Heim on this point, blames advocates of penal substitution theory for inverting “the meaning of the death of Jesus” and making the sacrificial death a part of God’s will.\footnote{Michael Hardin, “Practical Reflections on Nonviolent Atonement,” in René Girard and Sacrifice in Life, Love, and Literature, vol. 2 of Violence, Desire and the Sacred, ed. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 249.} For most Girardian thinkers, the belief in a redemptive death is the ideology of the crowds, not that of Jesus himself. To return to Heim again, he
contends that adopting a view of Jesus’ death as redemptive means that one is “entering the passion story on the side of Jesus’ murderers.” However, the Last Supper sayings, especially as they have been understood in the previous chapters, certainly dispute such an assertion. The Last Supper sayings are not uttered by those plotting Jesus’ death. Rather, Jesus speaks them. If one is to follow good hermeneutical practice and privilege Jesus’ words over those of the crowds, then one cannot dismiss them as irrelevant. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Synoptic Jesus articulates a view that his death is a covenant sacrifice that will instantiate the kingdom and the covenant. Adopting such a viewpoint is not assuming the ideology of the crowds, but that of the Gospels’ central character, Jesus.

Thus, the Gospels deliver a more complicated picture of the Father’s relationship to the cross than what Girardian soteriology has allowed. In the Gospels, the cross is not solely the will of humanity, for the cross is the Father’s will too. One can certainly understand the Girardian desire to create a pristine view of the Father cleansed of all involvement with violence, even the violence of the cross. However, the Gospels cannot be counted on for support in this regard. To put it simply, the Gospels put forth a more complicated view of the Father’s relationship to the crucifixion of Jesus where the Father wills the cross and can in some fashion be said to “strike the shepherd,” though this never eclipses humanity’s participation or responsibility for the evil in the cross.

6.A.2.c. The Effects of the Cross

Within Girardian soteriology, the cross has a direct impact upon humankind, but it is rarely articulated in a way that suggests there is any impact on God’s relationship to humans. According to Girard, the cross solely resolves the problem of humanity’s misunderstanding

---

899 Heim, Saved from Sacrifice, 126.
concerning the culpability of its victims. Other followers of Girard, like Schwager and Alison, have expanded upon this to include the notion that the cross and resurrection reveal God’s goodness to humankind as well. Nevertheless, even with the introduction of the more positive dimension of the cross’s significance, the main object affected by the death and resurrection remains humanity’s understanding. For most Girardians, the death and resurrection have no effect on humanity’s relationship with the divine, unless it finally clears away the misconceptions about God that have kept humans from pursuing such a relationship. Regardless, if the cross changes anything in the divine-human relationship, it is located on the human side of the relationship.

Nevertheless, there are some exceptions in this regard, and Heim has the most robust articulation regarding how the cross, as understood within a Girardian framework, could be construed to speak of a reconciliation between God and humanity. He writes:

I unequivocally advocate a reversal of polarity in our common theology of the cross. We are not reconciled with God and each other by a sacrifice of innocent suffering offered to God. We are reconciled with God because God at the cost of suffering rescued us from bondage to a practice of violent sacrifice that otherwise would keep us estranged, making us enemies of the God who stands with our victims. ⁹⁰⁰

This is a helpful way of articulating how a Girardian understanding of the cross can still speak of reconciliation with God, and it allows Heim to fill a lacuna that is missing in other Girardian thinkers.

For as helpful as such a point of view is, though, it seems to collapse all of the various sins into that of victimizing others. In fact, Heim seems to do just this a few pages later: “… many if not all of our individual sins are tributary to sacrifice in that they sow the conflicts that

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 320.
flower in social crisis and lead to redemptive violence.” Can the biblical view of sin be entirely summarized under the umbrella of victimization? This is where the covenantal backdrop of the Last Supper sayings becomes relevant. The Ten Commandments, the heart of the covenantal expectations, begin with expectations of faithfulness to YHWH. Even though the final commandments regulate one’s relationship with other human beings, the first four deliver expectations for humanity’s relationship with the divine. To equate the commandments requiring exclusive loyalty to YHWH with an injunction to protect the victim constitutes a simplistic reduction in what those commands expect from YHWH’s covenant partner. Thus, one seems hard pressed to summarize human sin under the sole category of victimization since the biblical view of sin is more expansive and includes prohibitions against worshipping other gods, prohibitions against making images, and misuse of the divine name. If human sin includes more than victimization, then there will need to be an explanation for how humans can be reconciled to God besides simply ceasing victimizing activities.

To return to the question of whether the cross and resurrection change anything in God’s relationship with humankind, the Last Supper sayings beg for a more encompassing understanding once again. As we have seen, the recurring history of Israel was one of covenant disintegration and subsequent renewal. Israel’s covenantal relationship with YHWH involved both a vertical dimension with God and a horizontal dimension with others under the covenant, and one cannot collapse one into the other but must allow both dimensions to exist simultaneously.902

All of the versions of the sayings over the bread and cup that have come down to us in the New Testament cast Jesus’ death within the context of Israel’s covenantal relationship with

---

901 Ibid., 321-2.
902 Levenson, Sinai and Zion, 53.
YHWH. Regardless of whether one follows Mark and Matthew seeing the “blood of the
covenant” as earlier or adopts Luke and Paul’s “new covenant” as a better representation of the
original, all four thrust the notion of the covenant to the fore. As a result, we cannot simply see
the cross and resurrection as solely altering a change within humanity or humanity’s
understanding of God. The covenantal relationship involved two parties that were formerly
estranged who can now enter back into a relationship once again. Moreover, if the Old
Testament does provide a theological background, one can find several examples of YHWH
willingly choosing to divorce his faithless spouse. If the covenantal relationship were to be
resumed, one cannot say the change will solely be made on the human side. Its resumption
would imply that YHWH, who had willingly severed the relationship earlier, has again willingly
entered back into the relationship. Therefore, we can conclude that the cross and resurrection, at
a minimum, signify a change in God’s treatment of his covenant partner and constitute the
effectual cause of that change.

6.B. Evaluating the Consistency of Girardian Thought

Those adhering to a Girardian understanding of the atonement will likely object to the
exegesis of the Gospels taken thus far since it would supposedly re-inscribe God in violence, the
very thing from which the cross purportedly saves us in a Girardian account. Now I have no
intention of portraying God as a diabolic deity who delights in death, but merely wish to point
out that, despite the contributions that Girard has made to Christian theology, his ability to claim
the New Testament Gospels for support is seriously compromised. Moreover, before the reader
rushes to condemn the exegesis of the Gospels that has been established heretofore, I would
invite the reader to a closer inspection of Girard’s thought on its own terms and agendas. In the
second chapter we have already seen ways in which Girard’s advocates like Schwager and Alison fail to remove violence from God. In this next section, I contend that when Girard’s theology is analyzed closely, it becomes apparent that Girard’s thought is unable to free itself entirely from divine violence in the following ways.  


Of the various theological conundrums that result from Girard’s theory, the first concerns Girard’s account of original sin, which jeopardizes an ability to affirm that God created human beings in goodness. The problem originates when Girard maps his theory of human nature onto the Darwinian evolution of human beings. For Girard, animals utilize imitation just like humans, so humans share imitative behaviors with their ancestors. The main difference between animals and humans, though, is that animals lack “acquisitive behaviors” and have some kind of instinctual resistance toward killing the less dominant members of the species, even if such a member were a former competitor for the dominant position in the group. While the animals of lower status will imitate the dominant animals for the sake of their corporate protection, imitation among animals precludes excessive rivalry and destructive social conflict. However, as

---

903 Many, however, proclaim that Girard has achieved this goal. For example, Shults positively affirms that Girard “… provides a way of relating culture to the cross without a divine sanctioning of violence.” F. LeRon Shults, Christology and Science (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 93. Others have observed that Girard’s soteriology must retain some form of “rhetorical violence,” “violence of alterity,” or “hermeneutical violence” when he identifies violence and sacrificial theology with the kingdom of Satan. See respectively Theo Hobson, “Faith and Rhetorical Violence: A Response to Girard,” Modern Believing 40, 1 (1999): 34-41; Dunnill, “Methodological Rivalries,” 105-119; and Putt, “Exemplary Atonement,” 21-45.

904 Several of Girard’s followers have sought to defend him on this point. Palaver, for example, argues that by situating Girard’s mimetic theory within the doctrine of Original Sin, Girard can escape such criticism. See Wolfgang Palaver, René Girard’s Mimetic Theory, trans. Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 223-6. Kirwan likewise articulates a similar conclusion. Unfortunately, he marshals no support for his contention that Girard has a doctrine of original creation in goodness, nor does he wrestle with the crux of the matter. See Kirwan, Philosophy and Theology, 141. In light of my argument in the above paragraph, I am skeptical of their ability to rescue Girard on this point.

905 Girard, Things Hidden, 91 (emphasis has been removed).

906 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 145.
this power of imitation increases among human ancestors, so does its power to induce acquisitive rivalry.

Girard’s account of human origins becomes theologically problematic when he correlates the appearance of human beings in the evolutionary process with the point when acquisitive rivalry increases to the point where it must find its resolution in the scapegoat mechanism. Girard writes, “Beyond a certain threshold of mimetic power, animal societies become impossible. This threshold corresponds to the appearance of the victimage mechanism and would thus be the threshold of hominization.”907 Thus, Girard makes the emergence of humans coterminous with the occurrence of the scapegoat mechanism.908 He affirms this again a few pages later: “Between what can be strictly termed animal nature on the one hand and developing humanity on the other there is a true rupture, which is collective murder, and it alone is capable of providing for kinds of organization, no matter how embryonic, based on prohibition and ritual.”909 In other words, only the scapegoat mechanism provides the decisive fissure, separating humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. In fact, Girard has maintained this point of view in a more recent interview with Phil Rose, where he affirms that the “mechanism of hominization” is none other than “the victimage mechanism.”910 To summarize the point, Girard’s understanding of human origins in theologically relevant terms: human beings are

---

907 Girard, Things Hidden, 95. He affirms the same thing on the following page: “We can conceive of hominization as a series of steps that allow for the domestication of progressively increasing and intense mimetic effects, separated from one another by crises that would be catastrophic but also generative in that they would trigger the founding mechanism and at each step provide for more rigorous prohibitions within the group, and for more effective ritual canalization toward the outside” (Ibid., 96).

908 Alison concurs: “The emergent difference that we later call a victim is at the root of our hominization.” See James Alison, “‘Like Being Dragged through a Bush Backwards’: Hints of the Shape of Conversion’s Adventure,” in Girard’s Mimetic Theory Across the Disciplines vol. 1 of Violence, Desire, and the Sacred, ed. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge (New York: Continuum, 2012), 27.

909 Girard, Things Hidden, 97.

essentially created—basically evolve out of animal societies—by the Fall, namely, the scapegoat mechanism.

By making the actuation of the scapegoat mechanism the point of humanity’s emergence, Girard imperils the prospect of affirming that God created humanity in goodness. In Girard’s account, there is no primordial state of human goodness or innocence that is later disturbed by the scapegoat mechanism. In fact, when Phil Rose directly queried him about this problematic area of his thought in a recent interview, Girard sidestepped the issue by redirecting the focus onto a different theological question. Either Girard failed to grasp the importance of Phil Rose’s question regarding the absence of original goodness or he did understand the question and redirected the question because he lacks a convincing explanation for how his understanding of human origins coheres with a belief that God created humanity in goodness. Failure to affirm such a tenet ushers in a slew of questions related to theodicy.

Girard has suffered criticism on this point, and some have categorized his theory as some version of Gnosticism with its view of a diabolic creator deity. In response, some scholars have sought to defend Girard on this account. For example, Depoortere and Kerr have both attempted

---

911 Others have affirmed a similar conclusion regarding Girard’s account: Rebecca Adams, “Loving Mimesis,” 279; Rose, Broken Middle, 147.

912 Part of the problem is that Girard makes the scapegoat mechanism a ubiquitous feature of human societies. Even Hobbes did not think the war of all against all totalized human societies to such a degree. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill (London: Green Dragon, 1651); reprint, Hobbes’s Leviathan (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), 92-8.

913 Rose, “A Conversation with René Girard,” 24-6. When Rose asks about the goodness of creation, Girard responds as if Rose were asking about how one should understand the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, which is not answering the question that was put forth. Girard turns to John 1:11 (“He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.”) in order to argue that humans first expel God rather than God expelling humans as the Garden of Eden depicts. This, at least on my reading of the question, was not the issue at stake for Rose and other people who question Girard’s ability to affirm God’s creation of humanity in goodness. Nevertheless, one should be cautious about using John 1:11 to counter the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, as Girard does. When John 1:11 talks about coming to “his own” it most likely refers to the covenant people of Israel and not humanity in general. See John W. Pryor, “Jesus and Israel in the Fourth Gospel—John 1:11,” NovT 33, no. 3 (1990): 201-18. As a result, one cannot say that John reverses the expulsion present in Genesis, when it is really only talking about the Jewish rejection of the Logos, which the Gospel narrative itself would unfold in the narrative about Jesus’ rejection.
to repudiate the charges by arguing that though violence might have a “historical” priority in Girard’s account of human origins, it is not an “ontological priority.” They contend that, even though hominization proceeds by the violence of the scapegoat mechanism, God’s end goal, as revealed in the cross and resurrection, is the kingdom of peace. Thus, even if God originally used the scapegoat mechanism as a means for human evolution, it is certainly not his teleological desire for humanity.

Depoortere and Kerr successfully demonstrate that Girard’s system does not construct an ontological dualism where good and evil are on equal playing fields, and their arguments persuasively refute Girard’s association with Gnosticism on this issue. Nevertheless, a serious problem still remains, and this is the problem from which Depoortere and Kerr cannot emancipate Girard. Even if God’s teleological goal for humanity constitutes inhabiting the peaceful kingdom modeled after Christ’s nonviolent behavior, Girard’s account of human origins says that God has, at a minimum, permitted and perhaps even chosen the violence of the scapegoat mechanism as the means by which humans would evolve and come into being. This contrasts with the traditional Augustinian framework, where humans are first created in a state of innocence, and God permits humans to choose evil out of respect for human freedom. In contrast, for Girard, there is no pre-lapsarian state of human innocence. In order to create the peaceful kingdom on earth, God has allowed the evil of the scapegoat mechanism to be the means of bringing humanity into being. Thus, humanity is created as already fallen because the Fall is the very mechanism of humanity’s emergence.

This way of framing human origins compromises one’s ability to claim that God is free of violence because violence is not a secondary development for humanity but its original state.

---

If humans were always in a fallen state, one can wonder if the creator is not partially to blame for the current state of affairs. Moreover, instead of evil being the parasitic privation of goodness, as an Augustinian account would have, evil possesses the creative potency to generate new ways of being. Instead of delivering a portrait of the divine free of violence, Girard has constructed a view of human origins that compromises his assertions that God cannot be assimilated with “violence” in all of its forms. If God foresees that the scapegoat mechanism will be essential for the emergence of humanity and still elects this way of bringing humanity into being, then God seems morally compromised by utilizing the violence perpetrated against an innocent victim in order to bring rational creatures out of the animal kingdom only to “create” them as members in the kingdom of Satan. In fact, God appears to be a cosmic utilitarian willing to allow or employ temporary evil in order to produce a greater good, namely, human creatures capable of higher rational and symbolic ordering.

6.B.2. Violence as the Means of Salvation

The second issue for Girardian soteriology arises from the very fact that, biblical texts aside, the violence of Jesus’ cross must remain an essential element, for only the cross can diffuse the knowledge of the innocent victim necessary for humanity’s salvation. In a Girardian account of the cross, humans are faulted for the violence, which seems to remove God from culpability, at least initially. However, when Girardian soteriology is pressed to articulate God’s will for humanity’s salvation, one is forced to reckon with the fact that God might, in fact, will violence against the son. To put it another way, if God truly desires a different cultural order than the one that has governed humanity from its infancy as the Girardian perspective suggests, then the cross must be willingly permitted in order to procure the saving revelation. Girard
appears to affirm something along these very lines when he writes: “Jesus willingly and knowingly accepts to undergo the fate of the scapegoat to achieve the full revelation of scapegoating as the genesis of all false gods.”\textsuperscript{915} In this section, he maintains that Jesus chooses to embrace the violence on the cross in order to bring salvation to others. On the same page, he writes: “God willingly becomes the scapegoat of his own people not for the purpose of evacuating internal violence through the old mythical misunderstanding but for the opposite reason, for clearing up once and for all such misunderstandings and raising humankind above the culture of scapegoating.”\textsuperscript{916} Thus, Girard describes the cross as something that is “willingly” chosen in order to deliver the saving revelation.

This is precisely where the problem arises. If the violent suffering of an innocent victim (i.e. Jesus) is the only means by which the “ontological priority” of the kingdom can be attained and the scapegoat mechanism can be deconstructed, God becomes complicit in the violence of the cross to the degree that he wills to accomplish human salvation through this very means. By implication then, God’s desire and will for human salvation via the cross means that God has to allow and even desire the scapegoat mechanism to run its course with Jesus if he is going to accomplish the greater good of humanity’s salvation. However, if scapegoating is the very problem with humanity and the very essence of its sin, basically that it is willing to sacrifice innocent victims, why is God justified in willing and embracing violence for the Son? It would appear the Girardian approach to soteriology finds itself thrust upon the horns of the dilemma in the very event, which it has tried to interpret as the paramount revelation of violence.

Finlan has also put his finger on this very weakness within Girardian thought, declaring: “For Girardian theory to work, God needs to reject \textit{all} scapegoating. Using it once is once too

\textsuperscript{916} Ibid., 319.
often.”\textsuperscript{917} Though Finlan finds this a point of contradiction within Girardian soteriology, he does try to rescue Girardian soteriology by differentiating between “a God-caused death and a God-anticipated death.”\textsuperscript{918} Though a “God-caused death” is hopelessly irredeemable in his perspective, a “God-anticipated death” remains a more viable option. However, distinguishing between these two options in Girardian thought is a bit complicated if not impossible. In the Girardian theory, God certainly anticipates the violence of the cross because of humanity’s past behavior.\textsuperscript{919} However, just because God anticipates such a death does not remove his complicity. In the Girardian account of salvation, God must still remain a factor to the degree that he chooses to participate in the rescue of humanity in this way. Cognizant that the cross is essential for humanity’s salvation and that the incarnation will lead to Jesus’ victimization (so Schwager), he still chooses to go through with the events that will knowingly precipitate the cross. Heim, who is more honest than most of Girard’s followers on this point, concedes that at the cross, “Jesus has become … an accomplice of Satan in something that is unqualifiedly evil. Even though ultimately this may be seen as a deep wisdom that ensnares and defeats Satan, it requires that God is not only willing to suffer in body and spirit, but also willing to suffer the moral ambiguity reflected in this exchange….\textsuperscript{920} Heim, I believe, is right to put it in these terms. God becomes an “accomplice” in the violence of the cross. God permits one to be victimized to accomplish the greater good.

Not surprisingly, several of Girard’s commentators overlook this fact. For example, Anthony Kelly who ascribes to Girard’s view of the cross asserts: “The victimization of some

---

\textsuperscript{917} Finlan, \textit{Options on Atonement}, 106.
\textsuperscript{918} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{919} Girard clearly says it is merely a God-anticipated death, so there is little question which one Girard understands it to be. See Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 213.
\textsuperscript{920} Heim, \textit{Saved from Sacrifice}, 152-3, n. 12.
can never be the precondition of a full life for others.” Unfortunately, he fails to note that Girard’s system still requires one to suffer for the benefit of others. Again, Ted Grimsrud overlooks the contradiction in Girardian thought: “Girardians associate sacrifice with sacred violence. Sacrificial theology does not help us overcome the problem of violence. Rather, such theology pictures ultimate reality (the heart of God itself) as requiring violence—the death of innocent victims. Thus ultimately sacrifice does not provide the means to genuine salvation and shalom but only feeds the spiral of violence.” Though the Girardian viewpoint no longer has the divine demanding sacrifices, in Girardian soteriology the sacrifice of one innocent victim does remain “the means to genuine salvation” since the Son must endure unjustified violence for the rest of humanity. Thus, attaining the kingdom of God, even in Girardian soteriology, requires the sacrifice of at least one innocent person, the Son.

Marlin Miller has been more perceptive than some other followers of Girard in this regard and attempted to circumnavigate the predicament by distinguishing God’s willful choosing of the cross from “God’s allowing people to respond by opposing and killing Jesus.” As he continues, Miller casts the choice to God as if it were a decision between either “obedience unto death” or “killing enemies with supernatural power.” However, this is a disingenuous way of arranging the options because the real choice from a Girardian point of view is whether God wills to save humans through the kind of violence necessary to expose the scapegoat mechanism or whether God will refuse to play a role in this matter and let humans languish in their violence. One can appreciate what Miller is trying to do yet still find the attempt

923 Miller, “Girardian Perspectives,” 39.
924 Ibid.
unsuccessful because God still chooses the route of the cross in order to save humanity, which will knowingly require the victimization of one more innocent victim.

Though Girard has statements that acknowledge God’s willful choosing of the cross, as noted above, he has other statements that explicitly deny any such complicity with the violence of the cross. For example, he writes: “If the fulfilment, on earth, passes inevitably through the death of Jesus, this is not because the Father demands this death, for strange sacrificial motives. Neither the son nor the Father should be questioned about the cause of this event, but all mankind, and mankind alone.”

Because the human problem is such that it requires violence in order to bring salvation, Girard tries to remove God from being responsible for the violence of the cross in any way.

In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard turns to Solomon’s judgment between two women vying for possession of the same child to make the case that God can adopt the way of the cross without choosing the evil of violence by reading the narrative as a parable. While the quarrel and the competing claims of the mothers coincide perfectly with Girard’s description of a mimetic crisis, he uses the narrative to expose a difference between the illegitimate form of sacrifice and the mother’s self-offering. When Solomon threatens to divide the child in two, the real mother relinquishes all claims to the child. As a result, she risks not only her future with the child, but also risks being thought a schemer and a liar. In light of this, one can say the mother truly does give up something of herself, but Girard was reluctant, at this point in his career anyway, to label this a sacrifice. To avoid associating such an act with sacrifice, he introduces a primary distinction. For him, death is constitutive of sacrificial language, but the mother is not truly pursuing death as such. Although she has jeopardized her

---

own life and reputation, she does it “in order to save life,” namely, the life of her child.926 Girard
indicates that this mother is “the most perfect figura Chrstii that can be imagined.”927 For Girard,
Solomon is analogous to the Father. Neither wants the death or sacrifice of the son. Jesus,
comparable to the good mother, must likewise renounce his claim to life. Thus far, the
comparison between the two accounts holds. However, there is a striking difference in these
parallels that Girard fails to mention. In the judgment of Solomon, violence is only ever
threatened. The mere threat efficaciously brings the truth to light. However, in the case of Jesus,
the truth can only be revealed through actual violence, and this is something that the Son and
Father know beforehand. Elsewhere, Girard affirms that God foresees this very “necessity.”928
Even if the divine choice has the primary goal of accomplishing human salvation, it cannot be
untangled from the inevitable victimization of the Son.

In the end, the attempts to make humanity solely responsibility for the cross’s violence
are unsuccessful even in a Girardian account. In the case of Girard, one finds the statements
removing God from culpability in conflict with those that posit his willing choice in the matter.
Girard cannot have it both ways. Furthermore, even if human sin demands that salvation must
occur through the lynching of an innocent victim, the Father and Son still choose to embrace this
very manner of procuring salvation. Even though humanity is the “cause” which establishes the
route by which salvation must occur in Girardian soteriology, it is still God who chooses to gain
salvation in just this way. Whether this choice is described as a passive allowance or an active

926 Ibid., 241 (emphasis is his).
927 Ibid.
928 Girard intimates as much in I See Satan Fall like Lightning that the only reason God allowed the
temporary enslavement to the victim mechanism was “because God knew beforehand that at the right time Christ
would overcome his adversary by dying on the Cross. God in his wisdom had foreseen since the beginning that the
victim mechanism would be reversed like a glove, exposed, placed in the open, stripped naked, and dismantled in
the Gospel Passion texts, and he knew that neither Satan nor the powers could prevent this revelation” (151).
Though God is not gambling with the outcome in Girard’s understanding, he foresees the exact steps to be taken in
order to undo the scapegoat mechanism and still chooses to walk down the morally ambiguous path.
choice seems to make little difference, for God must elect the violence of the cross in some way for us to be able to speak of the event theologically. If the cross were truly an unintended accident, then one could successfully remove God from complicity in its violence. Consequently, it would at the same time preclude any theological reflection about what God was accomplishing in and through Jesus’ death. However, Girardian soteriology does not believe that the cross is an accident, but the deliberate means by which God saved humankind. As a result, it must accept God’s complicity in the event if it is to continue making theological claims about it.

Since God is willing to enact the events that will knowingly lead to the Son’s victimization in order to attain salvation, one cannot say, with Girard, that God “never acts by means of violence, is never responsible for any violence, and remains radically opposed to violence.” Instead, God appears utilitarian, willing to use violence on at least one occasion against the Son in order to bring about a world without violence. The violence of the cross becomes a means to the peaceful end, but this unfortunately requires God to be complicit in the very thing that he is trying to exorcise. This, unfortunately, jeopardizes God’s goodness in a Girardian account. If earlier versions of Christus Victor theory were deemed inadequate because God compromised his character by deceiving the devil in order to gain human salvation, the same might be the fault of Girardian soteriology. God must compromise his nonviolent character in order to attain the saving knowledge for humanity.

6.B.3. Girardian Ethics

Not only does God appear complicit with violence in Girardian soteriology, Girard also delivers a conflicting view of human ethics. Though Girard has not formulated a systematic

---

929 Girard, Things Hidden, 214.
treatment of the ethical implications of his thought, most of Girard’s adherents anticipate that some kind of thoroughgoing nonviolent stance would be the only ethical response to evil in the world. After all, if Jesus is the moral exemplar and if he refuses to defend himself at the cross, then one should adopt his nonviolent behavior as well. Moreover, Girard’s critique of human “justice” as a derivative of the scapegoat mechanism calls into question any action on the part of the state to ensure peace or conformity through the threat and use of punishment. Perhaps Girard’s critique of human notions of justice succeeds too well, resulting in a critique too absolute that any effort to bring conformity or enforce peace seems contradictory. Such, problematically, is the case with Girard’s own statements.

Even though much of Girard’s conclusions appear to culminate in a pacifist position, he has jeopardized this very conclusion. In one particular interview, he actually supported the opposite, saying: “I would say personally I’m inclined to believe there is a just war on terror.” This is not to say that Girard endorses all of the ways in which the war against terror has been fought, but it does indicate that he thinks the violence of terrorism needs to be and can justly be stymied by war and violence itself. In addition, some reviewers have found one of his recent books, Battling to the End, conflicted on this very issue. Gardner assesses the book in the following way: “Here, we might say, is the problem of the book, which is that of Girard himself: He sometimes seems temperamentally inclined to cloak himself in a position (like pacifism or estrangement from politics) that in his intellectual conscience, theoretical principles, practical...
judgment, and heart of hearts he knows cannot be." According to Gardner, Girard remains ambivalent about the pacifist position in the book and stays noncommittal about the very position that seems to be the logical conclusion of his own thought.

Girard’s unwillingness to embrace thoroughgoing pacifism has frustrated some of his readers, especially those who anticipate a different conclusion. Despite such frustration and disbelief that Girard would conclude otherwise, his statements in support of war still stand and need to be synthesized into a more complicated picture of Girard’s thought. Thus, Girardian ethics does not condemn all forms of violence but, at best, most forms of violence. Furthermore, by allowing for the possibility of a just war, Girard opens the door to questioning other theological presuppositions. If humans in this sinful world can employ violence in a “just” manner, what is to prohibit God from doing the same? If humans trapped within a world where mimetic desire distorts the truth can determine justice accurately enough to engage in warfare justifiably, could not the same be said for a transcendent God who resides above the mimetic fray? Furthermore, if humans are justified in utilizing the violence of warfare to protect themselves and the world order, can one forbid God from doing a similar thing? To put the issue more directly, it seems contradictory to grant humans the use of violence in order to protect the peace of the earthly city and disallow God from using “violence” in the form of judgment or punishment in order to maintain the heavenly city. Nevertheless, even if we cannot argue analogously from what Girard permits in the human sphere into the divine world, Girard has delivered a more complicated and ambiguous ethic for humanity that does not vilify all forms of human violence.

---


934 E.g. Cowdell, Secular Modernity, 177-8.
6.B.4. *Conclusion*

Though the exegesis of the Gospels in the former chapters identified several instances in which God the Father was viewed as a participant in the cross and where the cross was seen as some form of punishment or sacrifice, which reifies a violent God-image from a Girardian point of view, a close analysis of Girard’s thought reveals that he has not fully succeeded in removing violence from God either. In the evolutionary emergence of humans and at the cross, God appears willing to use violence to accomplish a greater good that could not otherwise come about. Even though the good proportionally outweighs the evil allowed, Girard complicates his portrait of God in these two instances. Additionally, Girard permits human violence in the pursuit of justice in the war on terror. One can at least wonder that if such an allowance is permitted for finite human beings, there remains little to keep one from giving such freedom to the divine. In light of these observations, it does not appear that Girard’s soteriology has attained the moral high ground of a God completely free from violence nor has he delivered a soteriology that would ask humans to renounce all forms of violence. Because God can become complicit with violence to accomplish a greater good, one can legitimately wonder whether Girard’s thought has the theological consistency to denounce other soteriologies as violent or sacrificial and therefore in error.

Now this is not to say that Girardian soteriology more broadly speaking could not be emended to be more internally consistent, though it is doubtful whether it could surmount all of the above issues entirely. Certainly a follower of Girard that hews more definitively to the pacifist position would be more consistent than he. One can also imagine a revision to Girard’s theory of human origins that might be able to locate human emergence in a state of innocence rather than having the scapegoat mechanism be the point of demarcation between humans and
animals. However, the one criticism that appears incapable of circumnavigation would be the fact that God, if he desires to save humanity, must somehow remain complicit in the violence at the cross from a Girardian point of view. If this cannot be overcome, Girardian thought—both in its original formulation by Girard and in its development by his followers—suffers from an internal inconsistency where God is willing to become an accomplice with “evil” in the form of scapegoating to effect a greater good, namely, the emancipation of humanity from its violence. In fact, God does not appear all that different from archaic societies because he too believes that the sacrifice of the innocent victim, i.e. the Son, will bring peace on earth. The only difference is that God was right whereas humans have always been wrong because the scapegoat mechanism could only deliver the simulacra of peace.

6.C. Future Courses for Girardian Soteriology

If the arguments and the observations of the previous two sections of this chapter obtain, what options are left for Girardian soteriology? There should, of course, be a concerted effort to frame a more internally consistent theology regarding God’s relationship to violence. It is likely that Girardian theorists can produce a more amenable account of human origins that affirms God’s creation of humans apart from violence and a more thoroughgoing nonviolent ethic.

---

935 To do this, one must either locate the emergence of humanity at a different juncture than Girard does or explain how mimetic behavior, which initially must function positively, becomes corrupted to the point that it necessitates divine intervention. To succeed, the revisions will require more than a few instances to the contrary. Daly seems to allow for positive uses of mimetic behavior, but never succeeds in establishing an original state of goodness or innocence: He writes: “From all that we can reconstruct from our prehistoric past as well as from the past few thousand years of recorded history, our forebears usually chose the path of violence, might makes right, survival of the fittest, etc. In other words, both in its origins and in its (still ongoing?) continuation, hominization has been the story, with its endless sad variations, of human beings receiving the gift/offer of self-transcendence and, more often than not, turning it into (usually violent) self-assertion.” Robert J. Daly, “Phenomenology of Redemption? Or Theory of Sanctification,” Theological Studies 74 no. 2 (2013): 361.

936 Perhaps one could sidestep even this, but I can only imagine it being done if one were willing to surrender the transcendence that Girard identifies in the cross because the saving efficacy of the cross would necessarily be accidental, not a result of divine intention as noted above. Beginning with a logic contrived within the immanent world, one would fail to reach the transcendent.
Whether Girardian soteriology can fully avoid God’s complicity in violence at the cross without degenerating into semantic word-plays should at least be explored, though it may not prove successful in the end. However, the more troubling issue for Girardian soteriology that requires more wholesale revision is the biblical counter-evidence that has been explored in the previous chapters. For as much as modern interpreters might want the Gospels to emancipate God from any involvement with violence or provide a non-sacrificial interpretation of the cross, one is forced to reckon with quite the opposite, for God is the one striking the shepherd and Jesus’ death is depicted as a new covenant sacrifice that acquires the forgiveness of sins. As a result, Girardian soteriology has, from what I can foresee at this moment, several alternatives if the evidence of the preceding chapters should prove persuasive.

6.C.1. Abandoning the Global Claim: “a Canon within the Canon”

The first option is to retreat from Girard’s global affirmation that the Gospels entirely affirm his soteriology. Consider, for example, his assertion to the following effect: “There is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice, whatever definition (expiation, substitution, etc.) we may give for that sacrifice.” Though one might be able to fault the evangelists with introducing the language and logic of atonement at a later date, Girard closes the door on this facile way around the problem by averring that the Gospel writers faithfully transmitted the saving revelation. Thus, because Girard’s soteriological affirmations are grounded upon his assertions that the Gospels speak unequivocally about Jesus

---

938 Ibid., 181.
939 “But the most extraordinary thing in the Gospels is that this recognition comes from Christ himself, rather than the evangelists, who do everything they can in order to follow Christ, and overall they accomplished it.” Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 216. In fact, he assumes that the Evangelists represent Jesus to such an accurate degree that: “We have the impression therefore of a communication without intermediaries.” Girard, *Scapegoat*, 163.
accomplishing salvation and that they are accurate conduits of the saving revelation, any evidence to the contrary imperils his soteriological claims.\textsuperscript{940}

Unfortunately, the prospects of Girard’s soteriology are jeopardized by the fact that the Gospels do have passages that see Jesus as a sacrifice who will provide atonement for God’s people and renew his covenant with them, and these elements are located precisely in the passages that Girard ignores. In order for Girard to make the totalizing conclusions that he does, he would have to engage passages like the ransom saying or the Last Supper discourses and claim them for support. His failure to do so jeopardizes his conclusions. Even though several of his followers have tried to offer interpretations of these passages consistent with Girardian soteriology, they have not proven persuasive, especially when we read the Gospels as documents contextualized within the larger story of Israel’s exile and restoration. Besides these well-known passages, there are several other passages within the Gospels, like the prediction sayings, that do suggest Jesus is suffering Israel’s exilic punishment that was divinely ordained and that Jesus’ death was in some sense necessary as an atonement to renew the covenantal relationship between God and humanity. Moreover, if we interpret these passages within the context of the first century, then it is much more likely that they presuppose a soteriology involving penal elements than Girard’s soteriology.

Nevertheless, despite such counter-evidence, one need not surrender Girardian soteriology altogether. One could put forth a less comprehensive thesis about the Gospels and contend that a selection or a portion of the Gospel texts deconstruct the scapegoat mechanism, even if other passages rehabilitate it. Thus, instead of trying to find interpretations that bend the problematic texts into conformity with Girardian soteriology, one could simply concede that

\textsuperscript{940} While one of Girard’s interlocutors suggested that the Apocalyptic genre in the Gospels would force Girard to bifurcate the Gospels into that which is historical and that which possesses later accretions, Girard avers that the Gospels speak univocally about God’s non-violence. See Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 185-90.
certain passages do portray the cross as a result of divine intentionality. Perhaps the counter-evidence could be dismissed as later human projections into the Gospel accounts that have failed to make sense of the saving revelation. Regardless of how it gets fleshed out, this particular alternative would simply retreat from Girard’s global claim regarding the Gospels and concede that there are passages, which do not support Girard’s soteriology.

In fact, Girard’s interpretation of the Old Testament provides the resources for such a way forward. For instance, Girard’s exegesis of the book of Job conceded the presence of conflicting evidence. Even though Job utters statements that credit God with the calamities of his life (e.g. Job 19:2-7; 30:9-15), Girard says that these are instances when Job has succumbed to the myth of the persecutors. As a result, he contends, “In most of the Dialogues, the God of Job is not the Yahweh of the Bible.” In contrast to the views of Job’s friends and Job’s own capitulations to the mythological viewpoint, Girard identifies two passages as the main revelation of the book that rise above the mire of the mythological viewpoint: Job 16:12-21 and 19:25-7. Both of these texts constitute the “audacious revolt of the scapegoat” that refuses to crumble to the view of the crowd and instead clings to the belief that “God lends an ear to the victim.” Instead of allowing the various theological viewpoints expressed in Job to stand in unresolved tension or trying to synthesize them together into a coherent portrait, Girard sees the theology and discourses condemning Job as an attempt to suppress the true revelation that Job, the scapegoat, is innocent of the wrongs being foisted upon him. The book of Job is thus a conflicted text that simultaneously includes both the revelation of the innocent victim and the

---

941 For instance, when Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song implicates YHWH in the death of the Servant, he believes this is the result of “a later interpretation that falsifies the text.” Girard, Things Hidden, 227.
942 Girard, Job, 125-9.
943 Ibid., 132.
944 Ibid., 138-40.
945 Ibid., 138.
946 Ibid., 143.
mythological condemnation of the crowds, but Girard privileges only a very minute portion of
the book as revelation. It is not too far of a leap to say that the Gospels are similar in that they
also contain both revelation and the condemnation of the scapegoat.

Girard openly admits that the anti-mythological bent of Job is a minor theme that is on
the verge of extinction in the book. However, in order to privilege these two passages to
discredit the more numerous passages condemning Job, Girard appeals to another group of texts,
the Gospels:

For the Dialogues to be interpreted as they should, as I have already mentioned, we must
choose the side of the victim against the persecutors, identify with him, and accept what
he says as truth…. As it has come down to us, the Book of Job does not insist enough on
our hearing the complaint of Job: many things divert us from the crucial texts, deforming
and neutralizing them with our secret complicity. We need, therefore, another text,
something else, or rather someone else to come to our aid: the text of the Passion, Christ,
is the one to help us understand Job, because Christ completes what Job only half
achieves, and that is paradoxically what in the context of the world is his own disaster,
the Passion that will soon be inscribed in the text of the Gospels.\footnote{Ibid., 163.}

Thus, in his approach to Job, which is paradigmatic of his approach to much of the Old
Testament, the Gospels become the text that verifies the true import of Job.

Girard’s exegesis of Job reveals the inherent problem of this particular option and
perhaps illumines why Girard felt compelled to contend the Gospels are in full support of his
position. In his exegesis of Job, Girard is able to lean upon the Gospels as the hermeneutical key
which identifies the transcendent viewpoint in the conflicted text. In essence, the Gospels
function as the Archimedean point by which Girard is able to clear away the mythological
viewpoint. With the Gospels—presumably unadulterated by any kind of “sacrificial theology”—
in hand, Girard can dismiss the passages that justify Job’s condemnation. If, however, the
Gospels no longer remain the ciphers which decode all other texts but are themselves conflicted
texts, then not only do his conclusions of Job crumble, but humanity is left without access to an
immaculate, transcendent viewpoint that can speak unequivocally for God. Moreover, if the Gospels are conflicted texts that re-inscribe God in violence and situate Jesus’ death as a sacrifice that accomplished the forgiveness of sin, Girard provides no other texts to which one might appeal to verify that the sacrificial viewpoint is wholly in error. Furthermore, if the biblical tradition can no longer serve as the sure ground upon which to assess the world, admitting that the Gospels are conflicted texts threatens to destabilize Girard’s wider anthropological assumptions since the exposure of mythology and humanity’s penchant for justifying its victims only comes through the Gospel texts.\(^{948}\) The only remaining group of texts that might serve in such a fashion is Girard’s own oeuvre.

In one of the debates regarding Girardian thought, Schwager retreated to this very conclusion. In the conversation, Schwager was asked to identify the master text from which he could discern the workings of the scapegoat mechanism. Schwager admitted that one can only categorize a story like the Joseph cycle in Genesis as “plus révélatrice” on the basis of what appears to be an arbitrary criterion.\(^{949}\) One of the interlocutors pressed Schwager for a criterion upon which to judge the more revelatory texts since one can find ample support for divine violence in the Bible. Though Schwager responded by pointing toward the Gospels, he was forced to qualify his criterion further as “la théorie de Girard” rather than making his criterion the Gospels alone.\(^{950}\) Thus, the Gospels, as a whole, do not form the criterion for identifying revelation in the Bible, but rather Girard’s interpretation of the Gospels do.

Schwager’s concession on this point again reveals the problematic nature of adopting this solution to the counter-evidence. For one, we had reason to question the validity of Girard’s

---

\(^{948}\) This potential weakness was noted by Jean-Michel Oughourlian in the dialogue contained in Girard, *Things Hidden*, 185.


extensive use of mythology in order to interpret the Gospels earlier. More detrimentally, conceding that only a portion of the Gospels contain the saving revelation would subject Girardian thought to the old saw of being nothing more than another “canon within the canon.” Klug summarizes the deficiencies of such an approach: “The simple fact is that the Bible itself supports no formula whatever, whereby the Word of God and Scripture are to be sifted like flour from grit.” Continuing on, he writes, “Holy Scripture does not allow itself to be split down the middle arbitrarily into that which is human and that which [is] divine.” This, however, would be precisely what this particular revision to Girardian soteriology would need to do. It would have to identify strands in the Gospels that represent the “divine” viewpoint and distinguish them from those that represent the “human” viewpoint. Statements that fall from the lips of Jesus (the Last Supper sayings, the Ransom logion, etc.) would need to reflect later accretions to the tradition, and one might even marshal historical Jesus research for support. If Girardian thought is to be revised along these lines, it would require a decision to ignore or delete the passages in contradiction with Girardian soteriology, and this would always be susceptible to the charge of being a capricious, arbitrary, and ideologically self-serving choice. Furthermore, the nagging problem of God’s complicity in violence at the cross would remain a perpetual concern because the violence of the cross would still remain necessary for the diffusion of the saving revelation.

---

951 Dunnill, *Sacrifice and the Body*, 159. The concession that Schwager makes lands Girardian soteriology in the crosshairs of Dunnill’s criticism: “The effect is in fact to imprison Christology within his bold but inadequate theory, because salvation would then come to lie, not in the cross and resurrection, but in apprehending the Girardian understanding of violence.”


953 Ibid.

954 In Michael Rogness’ rescue of the “canon within the canon” approach—this is not unique to him but appears in other authors too—he argues that using a “canon within the canon” is unavoidable since everyone privileges certain passages over others. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is more relevant today than the law about not boiling a goat in its mother’s milk. His point is well taken, but the reading of the Gospels proposed above would still differ from his attempt to rescue the “canon within the canon.” Rogness’ approach would allow both passages to remain as a part of the canon. However, the Girardian version of a “canon within the canon” would be a bit different. No longer is it a matter of weighting one set of data as more relevant to another, but expelling one in favor of another. Michael Rogness, “A Canon within the Canon? Yes: Proclaim Christ,” *Word & World* 26, no. 4 (2006): 436, 438.
For these reasons, other options are more preferable, though some no doubt have taken and will take this first option.\textsuperscript{955}

6.C.2. Assimilation 1: One Theory among the Many

If one wished to align Girardian theory in more accord with the biblical texts, especially as they have been interpreted in the prior chapters, and not simply reject the counter-evidence, a more radical reconfiguration of Girardian theory would be necessary. As a beginning first step, Girardian soteriology would have to be unseated from its claim to be the quintessential explanation of the cross. This is necessary because, in its current form, Girardian soteriology has made itself incommensurable with any penal understanding of the cross.\textsuperscript{956} In effect, Girardian theory paradoxically—even contradictorily so—ends up scapegoating “sacrificial Christianity” as part of the problem within humanity that must be overcome.\textsuperscript{957} As we have seen, these are precisely the elements that remain stubbornly embedded in the Gospel narratives. If one is going to redraw Girardian soteriology along biblical lines and delete its scapegoating of other

\textsuperscript{955} E.g. Baker, \textit{Executing God}, 18, 90. It is not entirely clear whether Baker would label herself as a follower of Girard or not, though her soteriology mirrors many of the same features one finds in Girard. Baker admits she is using a “canon within the canon” approach, but claims everyone does the same and that she is not ignoring the texts that speak about God’s violence. However, one can legitimately question whether she is only privileging certain strands of Scripture as she claims or whether she goes farther and dismisses the portions with which she disagrees. The fact that none of the “violent” passages seem to inform her theology and the fact that there is no expressed desire to synthesize the “violent” portions into a more encompassing portrait of God, suggest it is more of the latter.

\textsuperscript{956} Girard writes: “If you have really followed my argument up to this point, you will already realize that from our particular perspective the sacrificial interpretation of the Passion must be criticized and exposed as a most enormous and paradoxical misunderstanding—and at the same time as something necessary—and as the most revealing indication of mankind’s radical incapacity to understand its own violence, even when that violence is conveyed in the most explicit fashion.” Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 180-1. Dizdar follows Girard, labeling other views that require some kind of “atonement” as “the very ‘sin of the world.’” Draško Dizdar, “Finding the Way: How to Study Scripture with the Help of Scripture and the Desert Fathers,” in \textit{Girard’s Mimetic Theory across the Disciplines}, vol. 1 of \textit{Violence, Desire and the Sacred}, ed. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge (New York: Continuum, 2012), 46.

\textsuperscript{957} Dunnill, \textit{Sacrifice and the Body}, 160. In an interview with Richard Golsan, Girard concedes that assuming a particular theological position and disagreeing with another constitutes scapegoating. See Golsan, \textit{Girard and Myth}, 135. While Golsan offers the words, Girard qualifies his affirmative response by noting that “…there are different levels of scapegoating.” This basically reveals that scapegoating, even for Girardian theory, is paradoxically unavoidable. If so, it is worth asking at which point it becomes problematic or wrong to “scapegoat.”
atonement theologies, then it will have to be reformulated so it can coexist alongside of other theories or soteriologies that might include penal elements.

There are two ways in which this process might proceed after this point, both of which require some form of assimilation with other theories of the atonement. In the first way, all of the atonement theories—from Christus Victor up through Girard’s scapegoat theory—could be relativized in a way that acknowledges their particular insights without affording any one theory the power of fully explaining the cross. Thus, none of the views would be able to explain the atonement *in toto*. Joel Green’s “Kaleidoscopic View” of the atonement closely approximates this view.\(^{958}\) Though the atonement metaphors in Green’s account derive from the biblical metaphors, he demands that we cease trying to privilege one metaphor over another. Instead, the metaphors all contain insights that must be retained, though some may be granted more precedence during eras where they prove more relevant. Nevertheless, the failure of any one theory or metaphor to exhaust the inner workings of the atonement betrays the transcendent mystery inherent in the atonement. Thus, each theory or metaphor would be essential to understanding God’s salvation of humankind but could never satisfactorily explain its totality.

In such a paradigm, Girardian soteriology could uniquely contribute the insight that the cross is a revelation of humanity’s injustice and that humankind is willing to conscript notions of law, justice, and the power of the state in order to muffle the voice of innocent victims for the sake of peace. As such, it would serve as an enduring reminder of humanity’s pernicious tendency to justify its sinful behavior. At the same time, Girardian soteriology, though offering a valid criticism of human law and its connection with the divine law, could not fully deliver a wholesale rejection of a soteriological view in which God would enforce boundaries or punish sin. In short, Girardian soteriology would no longer be able to expel certain theories of the

\(^{958}\) Green, “Kaleidoscopic View,” 157-85.
atonement like satisfaction or penal substitution theories but would have to concede that these theories do in fact offer some insight into the mystery of the atonement. Whether the plethora of views that have been offered throughout church history can find some logical unity in the aggregate or whether they can coherently exist alongside of each other are questions worth exploring, though it is one of the detriments to this particular approach because it presumes that, if there is a logic driving the God’s salvation of humankind, it is not fully intelligible to us.\textsuperscript{959}

6.C.3. \textit{Assimilation 2: Supporting a Governing Theory}

The second manner of assimilating Girardian soteriology would be to place it into an interpretive framework where another governing theory provided the logical soteriological structure. In this option, Girardian theory would play a subservient role, furthering explaining another theory, though making valid contributions on its own. One could, for instance, make Christus Victor the controlling theory and incorporate Jesus’ ability to resist caving to the mimetic contagion as one of ways in which God conquers evil. If such an approach is to be informed by the biblical exegesis of the former chapters, it will have to retain a penal or satisfaction element in some fashion. Perhaps N.T. Wright’s soteriology would be amenable to this, for he elevates Christus Victor as the dominant atonement theory, making it the gravitational center around which all of the other theories revolve.\textsuperscript{960} Underneath this particular umbrella, Wright includes a penal element of the cross.\textsuperscript{961} In addition, Wright also sees a dimension of God’s victory over evil including the exposure of the political authorities.\textsuperscript{962}

\textsuperscript{959} In fact, Green’s “kaleidoscopic view” was criticized on the grounds that it appears to presuppose no internal logic. See Gregory A. Boyd, “Christus Victor Response,” in The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 187.

\textsuperscript{960} N.T. Wright, Evil and the Justice of God (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2006), 95.

\textsuperscript{961} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{962} Ibid., 79-80.
Though Wright’s account is largely informed by his historical reconstruction of the events and political wrangling that led to the crucifixion, one could just as soon borrow insights from Girard’s anthropology and soteriology in order to elucidate more thoroughly the psychological forces that put Jesus on the cross. Of course, Girard’s mimetic theory and its corresponding explanation of the cross would not be adopted wholesale, but they could be utilized to construct a more robust account of the crucifixion and the battle that was waged with the powers.

However, the discussion of the previous chapters and the covenantal motif present in the Last Supper sayings suggests that a theory of atonement that privileges the story of God in covenant with his people might be better suited to serve as the governing motif into which various atonement theories could be assimilated. Regrettably, theologians have rarely turned to the covenantal motif in order to ground and frame their understanding of the atonement. The recent publication of Michael Gorman’s *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant: A (Not So) New Model of the Atonement* might serve to encourage others to recast the atonement in this regard. Nevertheless, it is an often overlooked area that is pregnant with promise not only because of its biblical roots but also because it can assimilate various atonement theories and the different dimensions of salvation under its wings.

---


The power of the covenantal approach to assimilate aspects of the various atonement theories is great. For example, it can incorporate the very penal elements that have been identified in the cross. Jesus’ death identifies with Israel specifically and humanity more generally in that he takes on the punishment for breaking the covenantal expectations. However, the atonement and salvation would by no means be limited to a legal transaction or the assumption of a punishment. The new covenant promises reveal that God’s intended salvation was not simply removing the punishment the erring covenant partner deserved but included the moral transformation of his people so they would keep his covenant in the future. In order to resume and fortify the covenant relationship, their guilt for breaking the covenant had to be removed and the partner’s character had to be molded in order to be the faithful partner that God desired. Thus, the divide between justification and sanctification that has dogged much Protestant theology could be unified around God’s desire to renew the covenant with his wayward people and recreate them into his intended covenant partners.\(^{965}\)

Within this framework, Girardian soteriology could play an informative role about the nature of human beings. In Girardian thought, the cross is a revelation of human sin, and this very insight would be reframed but still useful in a reconstructed atonement theology drawn upon covenantal lines. The Gospel writers do not simply describe the cross as Jesus’ adoption of Israel’s exilic punishment. They also reveal that the cross was the result of religious and political leaders trying to protect their power. What is most striking in the accounts of the Passion is that the religious leaders appealed to the covenantal expectations, the Mosaic law, in order to justify their collusion in Jesus’ death (Mark 14:64). These religious trials reveal that humans possess the sinister ability of justifying their violence and sin through appealing to the...

\(^{965}\) Helpful progress has been made in these lines already, and it is certainly a positive direction, which a covenantal view of salvation would support. See Gilbert Meilaender, *The Freedom of a Christian: Grace, Vocation, and the Meaning of our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 49-53.
covenant itself. These accounts reveal that, when one’s adherence to the covenant departs from its *telos* of love, the covenantal expectations can become a means of victimizing and oppressing another. The wrangling and petty posturing for power that hangs Jesus on the cross is not the intended outcome of the covenant. In fact, one can say just the opposite: the crucified Jesus who faithfully fulfilled the *telos* of the covenant to the end remains the example *par excellence* of covenant faithfulness. Instead of following the morally scrupulous religious leaders who are willing to dispense with an opponent on religious grounds, incorporating Girard’s insights would point to the fact that Jesus’ demonstration of love and forgiveness reveals the true ethos of the covenant.

By the same token, incorporating the insights of Girardian soteriology would also question our ability to map divine justice onto the canons of human justice in all instances. As a result of incorporating Girardian soteriology, one would be forced to part ways with those, like Calvin, who do equate human justice with divine justice, especially in the Passion narratives. In Calvin’s exposition of the atonement, he makes it essential that Christ dies as a criminal condemned in a human court of law.966 Only by being condemned in a human court of law can Jesus also receive the divine punishment for sin. Calvin even goes so far as to claim: “Had he been cut off by assassins, or slain in a seditious tumult, there could have been no kind of satisfaction in such a death.”967 Because Calvin directly interweaves human law with divine law, he is unable to separate the two at the cross and makes the human courts’ condemnation of Jesus the organ of divine justice.968 In so doing, Calvin forfeits any ability to find in the condemnation

---

967 Ibid.
of Jesus an exposure or revelation of human depravity, much less a critique of the political authorities that put Jesus on the cross..

At this juncture, it might seem that one is forced to embrace either Girard or Calvin wholesale. It could appear that, if one affirms a penal aspect to the cross, one is forced to walk the entire way with Calvin and see Pilate’s condemnation of Jesus as a mechanism of the divine court of justice. On the other hand, it might appear that, if one wishes to see the cross as a revelation of human sinfulness and injustice, one must jettison any kind of divine penalty in the cross and follow Girard.

However, we are not forced to choose between the two. In fact, adopting the covenantal motif as the governing framework for the atonement provides a way of assimilating the two. In Miroslav Volf’s masterful work, *Exclusion and Embrace*, he explains that an essential component of renewing ruptured relationships—ones that have been broken because one of the parties has broken their covenanted agreements—with other people requires a willingness to suffer injustice. In order to re-establish a broken relationship, Volf believes that “injustice” must accompany any such overture for continued relationship. An innocent party undoubtedly must give more than the requirements of retributive justice would dictate and suffer a loss of some kind:

If such suffering of the innocent party strikes us as unjust, in an important sense it *is* unjust. Yet the ‘injustice’ is precisely what it takes to renew the covenant. One of the biggest obstacles to repairing broken covenants is that they invariably entail deep disagreements over what constitutes a breach and who is responsible for it.…. In a world of clashing perspectives and strenuous self-justifications, of crumbling commitments and strong animosities, covenants are kept and renewed because those who, from their perspective, have not broken the covenant are willing to do the hard work of repairing it.969

Though Volf’s comments describe the reconstitution of human relationships, the same thing could be said about God’s resumption of the covenant with his people. From God’s perspective, there was no reason for him to renew the relationship. Measured by the standards of retributive justice and the conditions established by the covenant, God had no reason to endure the cross. In fact, retributive justice would have directed the punishment at the other party in the covenant, Israel or humanity. However, God was willing to endure the injustice of the cross in order to maintain the covenantal relationship. What God in Jesus suffers at the cross is nothing less than a gross infraction of the covenant even though his death was erroneously justified on those same grounds. Thus, on the one hand, we can stand with Girard and call the cross an unjust annihilation of a covenant partner that was propped up by the distorted interpretations of the covenant.

On the other hand, we can stand with the Gospel writers and other theories of atonement that have found in the cross a penal or satisfaction element. Volf’s comments again provide a point of entry for the discussion. He describes the story of the cross in relationship to the covenant in the following way: “For the narrative of the cross is not a ‘self-contradictory’ story of a God who ‘died’ because God broke the covenant, but a truly incredible story of God doing what God should neither have been able nor willing to do—a story of God who ‘died’ because God’s all too human covenant partner broke the covenant.” Volf’s final line can be taken in two ways, and he unfortunately leaves its meaning rather ambiguous. In the first way, which would simply be affirming Girard, the execution of Jesus is a breach of the covenant. When the religious leaders turned against Jesus and pandered for his death, they broke the covenantal expectations. In the second way, Jesus’ death occurred as a punishment for Israel’s sin. Though

---

970 Ibid (emphasis is his).
Volf does not indicate which of the two he means, I think both meanings can be held simultaneously.

The former chapters of the present work illumine the way at this point. As we have seen, the consequences for breaking the covenant included God’s abandonment of his people to exile under foreign powers and death itself. The Gospels assume Israel’s state of exile and her hopes for restoration as the governing script in which Jesus lives and announces God’s imminent restoration. In light of this, it is not hard to understand why the Gospel writers depict Jesus’ death in the language of Israel’s exile. Jesus is handed “over to the Gentiles” (Mark 10:33), just like Israel was. Nor is it difficult to understand why if Jesus, as the innocent representative of his people, would unjustly suffer at the hands of the Romans, the Gospel writers would think that he would thereby inaugurate a new covenant between God and his people. By being faithful to the covenant to the point of death and suffering the punishment for his people’s previous breaches of the covenant, Jesus would renew that same relationship through suffering the injustice of the cross. Precisely by voluntarily entering into Israel’s exile, into the human condition where violence and death are the natural consequence for human sin, God revealed he still wants to be in relationship with Israel in particular and humanity in general. Therefore, by allowing a covenantal framework to govern the atonement, we can affirm with Girard that the cross is an act of injustice and a revelation of Israel’s failure to keep the covenant. On the other hand, we can also understand and affirm the Gospels’ description of the cross as a punishment.

---

971 When the Gospels portray the cross being a punishment or that God was involved in the cross, I think it needs to be understood in this sense, namely, that God has allowed violence to be the natural result of sin. As we noted earlier, Schwager seems to contradict himself when he allows the world to possess such a divinely created moral order that would allow violence to be the natural consequence for sin. Even though the point jeopardizes Schwager’s account, I think he is right and this theological point is useful in understanding how God could be credited with being involved in the violence of the cross.

972 Vidu wants to do something similar, but his appeal to divine simplicity only serves to make human actions incommensurable with divine actions. He does not adequately explain how the cross is both an injustice and a divine punishment. Vidu, Atonement, Law, and Justice, 271.
6.D. Conclusion

Our journey has thus come to an end. After beginning with a summary of Girard’s theory and his reading of salvation history, we then observed the manner in which several key thinkers have adopted and adapted Girard with special attention to the passages that would become the focus of the exegetical portions of the study. From there we traveled through the Old Testament and paid particular attention to Israel’s covenant with YHWH, their experience of exile from the land, and the promises of restoration. In addition, we noted that hopes for restoration endured in Second Temple Judaism long past the physical return under Cyrus and that these hopes informed the Synoptic writers and their presentation of Jesus as a savior. In making these observations, though, we were already beginning to frame the soteriological need differently than Girard. As we observed, there is good reason to conclude that the Gospels are written within the larger story of Israel waiting for restoration rather than the story of humanity enslaved to sacrificial and mythical thought. When our attention turned to those passages dealing with the cross, particularly the Last Supper sayings, we found several instances where Jesus’ death was cast in sacrificial language or it was presumed that Jesus’ death was participating in Israel’s exilic punishment. Unfortunately, these discoveries are detrimental to Girardian soteriology and require modification should the Gospels continue to be claimed for support. Nevertheless, despite the presence of passages that challenge Girardian soteriology, there are ways it could be amended in order to account for the problematic issues we have seen thus far.

While future efforts could be devoted to modifying Girardian soteriology in light of the exegesis in this study, our inquiry has opened up another vista that holds potential for casting soteriology in light of the biblical narrative: God in covenant with humankind. Exactly what it would look like to develop a soteriology rooted in the covenantal motif has neither been fully nor
satisfactorily traced out, in my opinion. Though biblical exegetes have long noted the preponderance of the covenant motif, theologians have only rarely adopted it as the governing framework for their soteriology. The fields are ripe for harvest and future soteriological work might benefit us all with efforts devoted to mining the theological ore of the covenantal motif in Scripture. If the theology of atonement is to move beyond being a theological abstraction from Jesus’ story and is to be read as the story of God in relationship with human beings, then the covenant motif might prove conducive for the task.

---

973 In my opinion, some of the current attempts at developing a covenantal approach to the atonement have some weaknesses in light of what has been developed in the earlier chapters of the present study. Gorman’s work, for instance, underplays the Gospels’ explanation for “how” Jesus’ death inaugurates the new covenant. While he may be correct that “the New Testament writers are far less interested in the mechanics of atonement than they are in the results of atonement,” his appeal to the mystery of the atonement and his relegation of the explanation to the pen-ultimate theories seems to dismiss the mechanics of the atonement that do emerge in the New Testament in conjunction with the covenantal theme. Gorman, *Death of the Messiah*, 210.


Barton, George A. “The Date of the Epistle to the Hebrews.” *JBL* 57, no. 2 (1938): 195-207.


Seitz, Christopher R. *The Book of Isaiah 40-66: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections.* In *Introduction to the Prophetic Literature, the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Jeremiah, the Book of Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, the Book of Lamentations, the Book of Ezekiel,* vol. 6 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible.* Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.


Snodgrass, Klyne R. “Reading & Overreading the Parables in Jesus and the Victory of God.” In *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright’s Jesus and the*


Waetjen, Herman C. “Genealogy as the Key to the Gospel according to Matthew.” *JBL* 95, no. 2 (1967): 205-30.


