

Jesus' Cry of Dereliction: Why the Father Did Not Turn Against or Away from the Son

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Last modified: February 1, 2018

Introduction: John Stott's *The Cross of Christ*

In his now-classic book, *The Cross of Christ*, John R.W. Stott presents a sweeping and impressive defense of penal substitutionary atonement. He gives a thoughtful exposition of Jesus' 'cry of dereliction' from the cross, his quotation of Psalm 22:1, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'¹ Stott considers three other interpretive options before he gives his own.

First, Stott notes, some have suggested that Jesus' cry was one of disbelief and anger, even despair. Stott rightly rejects this option. It attributes unbelief to Jesus. Interestingly, since this suggestion shares with penal substitution the view that the Father did in fact forsake his Son Jesus, Stott does not explore what it attributes to *God the Father*.

Second, others have interpreted Jesus' cry as one of loneliness. In this view, Jesus felt forsaken by God in the sense of not being able to sense his presence, and for some reason, was not able to name God his intimate 'Father,' but could only name him more distantly and impersonally as 'God.' Stott points out that the problem with this view is that it ignores the original meaning of Psalm 22:1: 'Yet there seems to be an insuperable difficulty [in that] the words of Psalm 22:1 express an experience of *being*, and not just *feeling*, God-forsaken.'² Maintaining continuity of the Psalm's original meaning is important as a criterion of what Jesus meant when he quoted it, which makes it all the more strange that Stott ignores that original meaning when he advocates the penal substitution view. In Psalm 22, David did not believe that God had forsaken him in a *vertical*, personal sense relating to not being able to sense God's presence, or experiencing God's wrath. David was referring to God forsaking him *horizontally* to menacing foes. David knew that the anointing of God's Spirit was still upon him, which meant that God was still present to him, and he was still present to God. I will explore this exegetically below.

Third, Stott considers the view that Jesus was uttering a cry of victory, which comes from the possibility that Jesus was invoking the latter half, or perhaps the whole, of the Psalm. Stott considers this to be a clever but far-fetched position, although he doesn't provide much explanation. I agree with Stott in the sense that even if Jesus was invoking the whole Psalm, laying stress on the latter half of the Psalm at the expense of the former appears to be little more than an attempt at avoiding a perplexing question. However, Stott demonstrates little to no appreciation of biblical intertextuality, which is the use one text makes of another. The Gospel writers establish multiple points of contact between Psalm 22 and Jesus' crucifixion, which they communicate through both direct quotations and allusions.³ Perhaps, then, Stott is premature at declaring wholesale intertextual referencing 'far-fetched.' Like many cases of biblical intertextuality, Jesus' quotation of the first verse functioned like an HTML hyperlink, which drew his listeners' attention to the whole Psalm, not to one verse considered in piecemeal fashion. Once again, we must consider what the Psalm originally meant *in the life of David*.

Fourth, Stott argues for Jesus' cry as a cry of real dereliction. He reasons:

'Jesus had no need to repent of uttering a false cry. Up to this moment, though forsaken by men, he could add, 'Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me' (Jn.16:32). In the darkness, however, he was absolutely alone, being now also God-forsaken. As Calvin put it, 'If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual... Unless his soul shared in the punishment, he would have been the Redeemer of bodies alone.' In consequence, 'he paid a greater and more excellent

¹ John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.78 – 83

² *Ibid* p.80 – 81

³ Direct quotation signaled as such: 'They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.' (John 19:23 – 24 and Psalm 22:18). Implicit allusions: 'O my God, my soul is in despair' (Mark 14:34 and Psalm 42:6). 'They pierced my hands and my feet' (Mark 15:24 and Psalm 22:16). 'They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.' (Mark 15:24 and Psalm 22:18). 'All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.' (Mark 15:30 – 32 and Psalm 22:7 – 8). 'My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws' (Mark 15:36 and Psalm 22:15). 'I am thirsty' (John 19:28 and Psalm 22:15).

price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man.’ So then an actual and dreadful separation took place between the Father and the Son; it was due to our sins and their just reward; and Jesus expressed this horror of great darkness, this God-forsakenness, by quoting the only verse of Scripture which accurately described it, and which he had perfectly fulfilled, namely, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’⁴

Stott’s approach to this passage would *affirm* that God does abandon and forsake us indeed, through the experience of Jesus himself. While a few people might take comfort by contemplating Jesus on the cross as commiserating with us in our experience of divine forsakenness, it is unclear to me why contemplating such a thing brings any comfort at all. Much to the contrary, my treatment of Psalm 22 on the lips of Jesus confirms that the opposite is true. God does not turn against or away from us in a vertical sense, because ‘in him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28) and ‘in him all things hold together’ (Col.1:17), even though we might struggle with how we feel exposed to hostile forces horizontally. And, since our limited perception is actually *the problem*, the pastoral task is to remind people that God never turns against or away from us, especially through the experience of Jesus himself. Why, then, did Jesus quote Psalm 22:1? What does ‘forsaken me’ mean?

As he quotes John Calvin, Stott provides a footnote acknowledging that there are some difficulties with how Calvin thought.

‘It is true, and somewhat strange, that Calvin (following Luther) believed this to be the explanation of Jesus’ ‘descent into hell’ after his death. What matters most is the fact that he experienced God-forsakenness for us, however, and not precisely *when* he did so.’⁵

Unfortunately for Stott, the difficulties with Luther and Calvin’s re-reading of Jesus’ ‘descent into hell’ after his death are even more problematic than he lets on – insurmountable, in fact. I will first comment on Calvin’s reading of the tradition of Jesus’ descent to the dead, and then comment on Stott’s reading of Calvin.

Jesus did not descend into *hell*, since hell proper does not exist yet, and will not exist until Jesus returns to resurrect all the dead (2 Pet.3:7 – 10; Rev.20:7 – 15). Jesus descended into *hades*, the abode of the souls of the dead which corresponds to the Hebrew conception of *sheol*, the grave.⁶ This belief answers a basic question about the fate of those who died before Jesus came, especially those mentioned – faithful or not – in the Old Testament. From a biblical standpoint, Jesus’ descent is rooted in 1 Peter 3:18 – 20 and 4:6, where Peter discusses the event as a gospel proclamation to those souls,⁷ and Ephesians 4:9, which says that Jesus descended to a place ‘under the earth.’ Moreover, the liturgies and beliefs of the church, which precede the composition of 1 Peter and Ephesians, strongly suggest that the church believed in this event from its earliest, apostolic period based on oral tradition handed down from the apostles.⁸ The phrase ‘he descended to the dead’ appears in Apostles’ Creed and its precursor creedal statements, found in various

⁴ John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.81

⁵ *Ibid* p.81

⁶ The King James Version’s translation of the Hebrew *sheol* with the English *hell* is misleading; conflating the two is incorrect.

⁷ I have encountered some who claim Jesus merely *mocked* the dead (or the angelic powers chained there) without giving them the opportunity for deliverance. But this does a great disservice to Peter’s logic in his letter. Peter parallels the proclamation that happened among the dead (by Jesus) and the proclamation that happens among the living (by Christians). He makes this parallel because he is reminding the suffering Christians that their proclamation must continue. Christ’s suffering led to death, but his death only enhanced his ability to preach, this time to a new audience: the dead! Similarly, the Christians’ suffering could lead to their death as well, but if they die virtuously, their death will further advance their proclamation among the living. Christians fearful of death might have argued that their removal from the world of the living would eliminate their testimony, thus making death a potential weakness in Peter’s argument. Rather, virtuous death strengthens the argument. This is a challenging perspective for the suffering Christian, but a useful one if we ask God for the courage and strength to live in it! For more, see my paper, *Christ’s Proclamation to the Dead: A Brief Look at 1 Peter 3:19 in Context*, found here: <http://nagasawafamily.org/peter1.3.19%20analysis.pdf>.

⁸ I accept the traditional dating of 1 Peter to the 50’s or early 60’s AD, based on the view of authorship as a collaboration between Peter and Silvanus (1 Pet.5:12) to explain its more sophisticated Greek. For the purposes of my argument here, skeptical scholars, who date the letter to the reign of Domitian (81 – 96 AD) and the persecution of Christians during this period, simply imply that the belief in Jesus’ descent to the dead must have spread as part of basic Christian beliefs years, if not decades, before 1 Peter was composed. For Peter in his brevity seems to assume that Jesus’ descent to *sheol/hades* is already common knowledge.

early church fathers even before Nicaea 325 AD,⁹ clearly modeled after Jesus' baptismal, trinitarian creed in Matthew 28:19. This phrase explains why ancient, pre-Reformation churches celebrate the liturgy called 'Holy Saturday,' also tellingly called 'Joyous Saturday' and 'the Saturday of Light,' between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, while some Protestant churches are often left wondering what Jesus did on Saturday. This celebration stresses Jesus' victory over death and the grave by his deliverance of souls from there. The Orthodox and Catholic tradition possess innumerable murals and icons of Christ trampling down the doors to hades and calling forth souls from the grave. One particularly beautiful mural is in Chora Church in Istanbul and is called 'anastasis' in Greek, for 'resurrection.'

Luther and Calvin asserted that the meaning of this event should be changed, without any precedent from exegesis, the history of biblical interpretation, or the church's liturgical memory. They argued that Jesus descended to the dead not to awaken and deliver the souls therein, but to be tormented even further by God's retributive punishment in the fires of hell. Much more can be said here, but what I have provided above suffices to call into question Stott's use of Calvin as an authority on the subject.

To get around these problems while trying to maintain that Jesus suffered a retributive punishment somewhere and somehow, Stott and others assert that Jesus' human soul suffered the torments of hell *while on the cross itself*.¹⁰ But Stott must now work at a double remove from Scripture and church history. Nowhere is this view attested in the Gospels themselves, except for Jesus' use of Psalm 22:1. The belief stands or falls on this text alone.

Continuing, Stott acknowledges that there are a number of 'theological objections' to his position and various 'problems' associated with it.

'The theological objections and problems we shall come to later, although we already insist that the God-forsakenness of Jesus on the cross must be balanced with such an equally biblical assertion as 'God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.' C.E.B. Cranfield is right to emphasize both the truth that Jesus experienced 'not merely a felt, but a real, abandonment by his Father' and 'the paradox that, while this God-forsakenness was utterly real, the unity of the Blessed Trinity was even then unbroken.' At this point, however, it is enough to suggest that Jesus had been meditating on Psalm 22, which describes the cruel persecution of an innocent and godly man, as he was meditating on other Psalms which he quoted from the cross; that he quoted verse 1 for the same reason that he quoted every other Scripture, namely that he believed he was fulfilling it; and that his cry was in the form of a question ('Why...?'), not because he did not know its answer, but only because the Old Testament text itself (which he was quoting) was in that form.'¹¹

Here Stott admits that the penal substitution theory defies *rational consistency* concerning the Father-Son-Spirit relationship. My stress here is on the word *consistency*. Was Jesus really abandoned by his Father?

⁹ Archbishop Hilarion Alfayev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell* (New York, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009) lists a formidable amount of literature: (1) non-canonical texts like the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the Teachings of Silvanus, and the Gospel of Bartholomew; (2) liturgical materials which were used in early Christian services such as the *Odes of Solomon* and Melito of Sardis' *On Easter*; (3) the writings of bishops and theologians including (in the 1st – 2nd century) Polycarp of Smyrna, (in the 2nd century) Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyons, Melito of Sardis, (in the 4th century) Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Epiphanius of Cyprus, Ephrem the Syrian, (in the 5th century) Cyril of Alexandria, (in the 6th – 7th century) Maximus the Confessor, and (in the 7th – 8th century) John of Damascus. A particularly noteworthy explanation comes from Athanasius, *Contra Apollinarius* 1, in which he argues that the human soul of Jesus entered the realm of souls.

¹⁰ R.C. Sproul, *Christ's Descent into Hell*, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/christs-descent-into-hell/> last accessed December 10, 2013, writes, 'In a few hours, Jesus suffered and exhausted the infinite punishment that impenitent people cannot exhaust even after an eternity in hell. He could do this because, in His deity as the Son of God, He is an infinite being... On the cross He suffered the full wrath of God that is poured out in hell... the hopelessness of losing the gaze of His Father's blessing and the torment of experiencing God's wrath for the sins of His people.' John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 2, chapter 16, paragraph 10 believed that Jesus descended into hell *after his death*: 'If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual. No — it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. For this reason, he must also grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death... No wonder, then, if he is said to have descended into hell, for he suffered the death that, God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked!'

¹¹ John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.81 – 82

Yes, Stott says. Was Jesus really not abandoned by his Father? Again, Stott maintains, yes. One wonders whether penal substitution now steps beyond the bounds of rationality itself. To say that Jesus both was and was not abandoned by his Father makes one hesitate to use rationality as a tool for theology, biblical exegesis, or criticizing other belief systems as irrational, if that tool can be so easily turned aside by handwaving over logical contradictions.

In medical substitution, and in the early church fathers, there is *no rational inconsistency about the Father's loving presence with and for the Son*. Glancing at the Gospel of John's theme of the Father-Son relationship gives us a very different understanding of Jesus' experience on the cross. Jesus defended himself against his opponents by saying that he does all things with the Father in tandem (Jn.5:17 – 21), and even exercises all speech and judgment and authority on behalf of the Father (Jn.5:22 – 30). Jesus declared, 'Not even the Father judges anyone' (Jn.5:22a), which would seem to include the Son himself, since Jesus continued, 'but He has given all judgment to the Son (Jn.5:22b). The Father is revealed in the Upper Room as being in the Son, and the Son being in the Father in an inseparable way (Jn.14:8 – 21; 17:20 – 26), even to the point where the Son glorifies the Father on the cross (Jn.17:1 – 5) and experiences the cross as a moment of self-sanctification (Jn.17:19), which comports well with medical substitution: Jesus' experience of the Father and holy status by the Spirit are *intensified* as he finally puts the corruption of sin within his sinful flesh to death (Rom.8:3), judging it on the Father's behalf and with the Father, thus preserving the Father-Son relation – not to mention healthy exegesis of John's Gospel – without ambiguity or contradiction, and without setting John against Mark and Matthew. The Father loves the Son (Jn.15:9; 17:23 – 26).

Surprisingly, Stott appears to feel no regret about interrupting and reworking Jesus' statement in John 16:32. 'Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.' This is deeply problematic, because Jesus' entire point in John 16:32 is to contrast the disciples, who will leave him during his time on the cross, and the Father, who will not. Stott, in effect, must make Jesus retract his statement. Stott must then group the Father in with the disciples on *precisely this issue*. This is an astonishing move, especially given John's stress on the Father-Son relationship of mutual abiding throughout his Gospel.

I propose that we revisit this question of Jesus' cry, using better tools than Stott had, chiefly from the field of biblical intertextuality and literary exegesis, but also a wider set of church fathers on the topic of atonement.¹²

The Portrayal of David and the Holy Spirit in Samuel and Psalms

First, we must ascertain the relationship between David, the human author of Psalm 22, and the Holy Spirit. David based his trust in God at least partially on his anointing by the prophet Samuel, which was the anointing of the Holy Spirit: 'the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David *from that day forward*' (1 Sam.16:13). The phrase 'from that day forward' includes the occasion of Psalm 22, whatever period David felt forsaken *to the Gentiles* in the wilderness. The author (or final editor, as the case may be) of the *Book of Samuel* extends the narration into the last years of David's reign. So even if we take the view that Psalm 22 was not rooted in one particular moment in David's life, but was a poetic composition which he came back to time and time again, the extent of the narrative of *Samuel* covers all those possibilities. David never lost the Spirit. His clearest personal basis for trusting God in the wilderness was the presence of the Holy Spirit who anointed him for the kingship and remained upon him '*from that day forward*.'

Thus, God did not withdraw from David at the time he composed the Psalm, *and David knew it*. So if this Psalm of David is now in our canon, how could God have forsaken David in any vertical sense pertaining

¹² Stott grossly mischaracterizes the early church as if they believed that Jesus merely tricked or satisfied the devil (p.112 – 114). Stott makes very brief mention of 'Latin fathers,' starting with Tertullian, then Ambrose and Hilary, as using the language of merit and satisfaction (p.116); he does not answer the question of why they did not believe in divine retributive justice or penal substitutionary atonement which would sit on top of it. Stott then moves to the 11th – 12th century theologian Anselm (p.117 – 120), and from Anselm to the Protestant Reformers (p.120ff.). Conspicuously absent from Stott's account of the history of Christian thought on the atonement are: Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, and Augustine of Hippo. He mentions the Cappadocian theologians Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, but sadly misunderstands them.

to Himself, *especially when David composed it?* Vertical abandonment by God is not what David actually said in Psalm 22, even in the season(s) of his life when he felt forsaken *horizontally* into the midst of hostile kings and powers.

The notion of divine abandonment troubles not only exegesis, as I will demonstrate below, but also orthodox creedal confessions. Within the scope of creedal statements – especially, Jesus’ baptismal creed of Matthew 28:18 – 20 and its eventual expansion into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 AD – the Holy Spirit is confessed to be fully God. If we believe David wrote by the Spirit (e.g. Acts 2:29 – 30), then we must also believe that God did not abandon David. If we believe Scripture is ‘God-breathed’ (e.g. 2 Tim.3:16; Jn.16:13, 15), following in the pattern of creation where God breathed life into Adam (Gen.2:7), and new creation where Jesus breathed the Spirit into the disciples (Jn.20:22), then we must also believe that God did not abandon David. Any theory of divine abandonment jeopardizes the full divinity of the Holy Spirit.

By extension, penal substitution advocates who assert that Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 from the cross in order to testify to some divine abandonment vertically, or rejection from God the Father, run afoul of many, many exegetical and theological problems. Like David, Jesus’ anointing was also the Holy Spirit, who had been manifested as anointing Jesus for kingship at his baptism in Matthew 3:13 – 17. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and inheres in the Son-Word as the divine energy who carries out God’s spoken promises (in early Eastern theology influenced by Athanasius), or the very bond of love between Father and Son (in early Western theology influenced by Augustine). In any case, the persons of the Trinity act inseparably and in unison. Therefore, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of the Holy Spirit being withdrawn from Jesus in any manner.

The Place of Psalm 22 in the Life of David

What place did Psalm 22 have in the life of David? It was part of his pre-enthronement experience of being hunted by Saul, the reigning and paranoid king, forced into the Judean wilderness, and occasionally pushed even further out among the Gentiles (1 Sam.18 – 31). This pre-enthronement period of David’s life is contrasted with his enthronement (2 Sam.1 – 5) and troubled reign, including the time he abdicated the throne to avoid civil war with his son Absalom (2 Sam.6 – 24). David did feel extremely vulnerable among certain hostile Gentiles, and penned Psalm 22 as part of that experience. His references to ‘enemies’ are many (Ps.22:6 – 8, 11 – 18, 20 – 21), which were probably, in the main, hostile Gentiles; but we cannot exclude the agents of King Saul.

David did not believe that God had forsaken him in an absolute sense. What he meant was, ‘Why have You forsaken me *to the Gentiles?*’ David recognized God’s providential care for him *from his conception*. And David also recognized that, although his circumstances as a young man were far more dangerous than any that confronted him while in the womb or at his mother’s breast, *God’s love and care for him had not changed:*

‘Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb
You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts
Upon You I was cast from birth;
You have been my God from my mother’s womb
Be not far from me, for trouble is near
For there is none to help’ (Ps.22:9 – 11).

Despite the external threats, David still experienced God as loving and protecting him, as having His face turned toward him with favor:

‘For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
Nor has He hidden His face from him
But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.’ (Ps.22:24).

Because Psalm 22:22 – 31 uses the past tense, some penal substitution advocates try to make this section correspond to Jesus’ voice in his resurrection and enthronement, after his crucifixion and death. But when

David penned this Psalm, he was not yet enthroned, and not yet out of danger. David was merely voicing his confidence in his difficult historical circumstances. Vocalizing thanks and praise to God in the past tense as if God had already delivered was a common literary device to express confidence in God (e.g. Gen.49:15; Ex.15:13 – 17; Ps.3:4; etc.).

There was a time when David worried about losing the Holy Spirit: When he sinned with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam.12). Psalm 51:11 expresses that concern. ‘Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.’ As a young man serving in Saul’s court, David had, after all, somehow perceived that king Saul had lost the anointing of the Spirit (1 Sam.16:14). But Psalm 22 was not an occasion where David was considering his own sin and mourning it. Instead, David was still confident of God’s presence, receptivity to his prayers, and favor (Ps.22:3 – 5, 9 – 11, 19 – 31; cf. 34:6 – 7; etc.).

The Place of Psalm 22 in the Book of Psalms

Does the Book of Psalms as a whole understand Psalm 22 as part of David’s pre-enthronement experience? Yes. We can see this because the Book of Psalms as a whole tells the story of David’s house; biblical scholars increasingly recognize this.¹³ The Book of Psalms conveys this story through the traditional Jewish division of the Psalms into five literary units.¹⁴

Book 1: Psalms 1 – 41 reflect the calling and early life of David. In David, God has prepared a man who meditates on Him and His teaching (Ps.1). God then anoints him as king (Ps.2), fulfilling His promise from the Torah to bring forth a king that will rule over the nations (Gen.49:8 – 12; Num.24:1 – 19; Dt.17:14 – 20). But David faces enemies who persecute him (Pss.3 – 7; 9 – 14; 17 – 18; 20 – 23; 25 – 28; 30 – 31; 34 – 38). Psalm 23 is a chiasm whose central point is walking through the valley of the shadow of death because of surrounding enemies (Ps.23:4); so the placement of Ps.23 after Ps.22 suggests that the final editor of the Book of Psalms believed that David could address trust and complaint to God more or less simultaneously during his difficulties, in case that was not already evident in certain individual Psalms. After all, one does not complain to a God one does not trust to fulfill His promises. David, perhaps by reflecting on the Torah, marvels at the creation and the majesty of God (Pss.8, 19) and confesses his sin (Pss.32, 38). Eventually, however, David recognizes that the Torah foresaw a godly king for Israel, and he is now that king: ‘Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book, it is written of me’ (Ps.40:7 – 17; probably referring to Gen.17:6, 16; 49:8 – 12). David says in song that God has delivered him from his enemies so that he might reign on the throne (Ps.41:11 – 13).

Book 2: Psalms 42 – 72 reflect the actual reign of David. There are psalms of praise and thanksgiving that celebrate God as help, deliverer, and refuge. The Psalms of the sons of Korah (Pss.42 – 49) might reflect a choir that David installed in for service in the sanctuary when he was king. Psalm 45 celebrates the king’s marriage. Psalm 51 is David’s confession of sin and failure connected to Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam.12). The book ends with a psalm ascribed to Solomon, the immediate heir of David, and has allusions to the covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7.

Book 3: Psalms 73 – 89, the darkest section of the Psalms, reflect the tragic history of the Davidic line. Psalm 89 contrasts God’s promises to David’s royal line (89:1 – 37) with the decline and sinfulness of David’s house (89:38 – 51). As the kings sin, and as the people of Israel decline into sin and ruin, the promises of God are the only hope. The collection of Asaph’s Psalms (Pss.73 – 83) reflects Asaph the chief worship leader who accompanied David when he brought the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chr.16:5). This may be why Psalm 50, a Psalm of Asaph, is located in book two, which seems to represent the actual reign of David. However, Asaph’s sons led worship and prophesied under the direction of the king (1 Chr.25),

¹³ Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1985); Gerald Wilson, ‘The Structure of the Psalter,’ in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Gordon Wenham, ‘Towards a Canonical Reading of the Psalms’ in Scott Hahn, Craig G. Bartholomew, Robin Parry, Christopher Seitz, Al Wolters, *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006)

¹⁴ The Book of Psalms seems to be modeled structurally after the Torah, which existed in five scrolls due to its sheer length. This makes much historical and theological sense. God’s covenant with David concerning the Davidic kingship, and the specific hope of the messiah’s reign of peace and justice over the world, are built upon God’s prior covenant with Abraham and Sarah (Gen.12:1 – 3; 17:1 – 22; cf. ‘kings’ in 17:6 and 16), and also with Moses (Ex.19 – 40).

so this collection of Psalms may reflect the institutionalization of worship at the temple under David's heirs.

Book 4: Psalms 90 – 106 reflect Israel's exile and a renewed focus on Moses and Torah. Moses' voice is heard in Psalm 90, which suggests a reminder of the Sinai covenant which occurred long before a king had emerged in Israel (1 Sam.8). David's voice, meanwhile, is muted. The section of Psalms 93 – 99 brings into focus the theme of God being the true king of Israel despite the waywardness of the people. The book ends with Psalm 106, which recounts God's promises to regather the nation from exile.

Book 5: Psalms 107 – 150 reflect hopes for God to renew the covenant, restore the place of true worship, and bring people back to true observance of His relational vision and moral law. God will regather Israel (Ps.107). David's line will be renewed (Pss.108 – 110). The observance of Torah within Israel will be renewed (Pss.112, 119). A new Temple will be built (Psalm 118). But this is not the doing of the first David, who was flawed and broken; it must be a new David, the Messiah (Pss.110; 138 – 145). That is one way to understand why the Psalter says that 'the prayers of David son of Jesse are ended' at the end of the second book (Ps.72:20), yet why the voice of 'David' reemerges in Psalm 110 and 138 – 145. So as the Songs of Ascent (Pss.120 – 134) were repeated by the Jews whenever they made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, they were reminding themselves of these promises and giving voice to God's own yearnings for the restoration of the Davidic house, Israel, and all creation.

Furthermore, the 'compositional seams' between the five books of the Psalms are (1) attributed to David, or (2) are about David, or (3) are reflections on God's covenant promise to David:

Book 1: 1 – 2; 40 – 41
Book 2: 42; 72
Book 3: 73; 89
Book 4: 90; 106
Book 5: 107; 145 – 150

Reinforcing the division of the Book of Psalms into five units, each 'book' of the Psalms ends with a doxology, which serve as intermediate markers:

^{41:13} Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
From everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

^{72:18} Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who alone works wonders.
¹⁹ And blessed be His glorious name forever;
And may the whole earth be filled with His glory.
Amen, and Amen.
²⁰ The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

^{89:52} Blessed be the LORD forever!
Amen and Amen.

^{106:48} Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
From everlasting even to everlasting.
And let all the people say, 'Amen.'
Praise the LORD!

^{145:21} My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
And all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever.
(Psalms 146 – 150 are praises)

The relationship between Psalm 2 and Psalm 22 is important in our study of the Gospels and the life of Jesus. Psalm 2 describes the anointing of the king from David's house and corresponds to David's own personal anointing. God quotes from Psalm 2 during the baptism of Jesus, to anoint Jesus with the Spirit to become king. But this anointing, for Jesus as for David, began his experience of facing very active opposition from the existing Jewish leadership *to give birth to a kingdom movement prior to being enthroned*. We will see that Jesus' own quotation of Psalm 22:1 from the cross is part of his pre-enthronement experience. It is part of Jesus' faithful response to being anointed by God to be king, while suffering at the hands of the Gentiles and the existing Jewish leadership.

The Book of Psalms and the Heir of David

The entirety of the Book of Psalms also draws our attention to the role of David's messianic heir in gathering up the praise of all creation to God.

Psalms 1 and 2 as Beginning Bookend

- Both Psalms conclude (1:6; 2:12) by referring to a 'way' that will cause human beings to 'perish' if they travel down it
- Both Psalms speak of folly, either opposing the way of God (Psalm 1) or opposing God's Messiah (Psalm 2)
- Both Psalms speak of 'meditating' or 'plotting' (Ps.1:2; 2:1), which are the same word in Hebrew; and 'sitting' and 'scoffing/laughing' (Ps.1:1; 2:4)
- The first word of Psalm 2 is 'hina' (*so that*), which suggests a continuation of ideas begun in Psalm 1
- The Western manuscript family of the book of Acts includes a reference to Paul's quotation of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:3. There, Luke refers to what is 'written in the *first* Psalm'; which suggests that Psalms 1 and 2 were once recognized as one unified Psalm.

Psalms 146 – 150 as Ending Bookend

- All end with 'hallelujah,' which calls together the praise of all creation to God

This literary and canonical approach to the Book of Psalms gives us two major lessons for exegesis and hermeneutics. First, the entire Book of Psalms, with all one hundred and fifty Psalms, needs to be considered whenever we are interpreting any individual Psalm. That is, the incorporation and placement of individual Psalms into the larger Book of Psalms is important. Doing piecemeal exegesis on an individual Psalm is important but not enough.

Second, thematic development within the Book of Psalms is significant for the treatment of other themes, especially themes related to the Christian doctrines of atonement and mission. Take, for example, the thematic treatment of 'enemies' in the Psalms. Who is an 'enemy'? Certainly many Psalmists take the perspective of calling other people 'enemies of God.' Yet, David recognized in Psalm 51 that he, too, was also an 'enemy of God' because of his own sinfulness. Does that affect how we read his imprecatory Psalms when he calls down God's judgment on his enemies? A literary and canonical approach strongly suggests that it should. The implication is that we are all beloved by God, and yet because of the corruption of our human nature, we at times oppose and resist God as well (Ps.51:5 – 8). That part of us that needs to be defeated, then, God will indeed defeat. So we say with David, 'Create in me a clean heart, renew a right spirit in me' (Ps.51:10 – 11).

By saying this, we attest and confess that our creational identity as bearers of God's image is more fundamental than our resistance towards God. While most individual Psalms do not do this, the Book of Psalms as a whole, does. If the kings, judges, and peoples of the Gentiles are commanded to do homage to the kingly Son of Psalm 2 (Ps.2:10 – 12), then they are also commanded to walk in 'the way' of the righteous, not 'the way' of the wicked (Ps.1:6; 2:12). And they too will also be gathered from exile by God (Ps.107). Psalm 107, the first psalm of the final collection, arranged to reflect the impact of the messiah and quoted as such by Mary and Luke, says, curiously:

'He sent His word and healed them,

And delivered them from their destructions/pits' (Ps.107:20)

God will restore people from exile through and around the heir of David, who, though he will suffer a devastating betrayal (Ps.109), will nevertheless be crowned as the Lord of David (Ps.110). His people will become a just and generous community (Ps.112), a new temple community (Ps.118) in which the law of the Lord is taught (Ps.119), sin is forgiven because the damage we have done to our image-of-God selves is healed (Ps.130). Remarkably, our iniquities will be undone as we are redeemed from them (Ps.130:7 – 8), which is a medical-ontological paradigm because we will become as children again (Ps.131); we will be co-heirs with this son of David on his throne, sharing in his royal sonship, and possibly even be God's new resting place (Ps.132); we will live in unity (Ps.133); the presence of God on earth will be renewed (Ps.134); God will fulfill His covenant promise to renew His creational blessing (Ps.135); God's goodness and lovingkindness will resound (Ps.136); the exile will be a distant memory (Ps.137); God will sustain and not forsake the work of His hands (Ps.138), which is shown especially by a renewed appreciation for being created in God's image (Ps.139), including our willingness to be internally cleansed (Ps.139:23 – 24).

Israel's greatest creed will be repurposed for a new relation between God and all creation. What began in Exodus 34:6 – 7 as:

'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;
who keeps lovingkindness for thousands,
who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin;
yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished,
visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children
and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations' (Ex.34:6 – 7)

becomes:

The Lord is gracious and merciful;
Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.
The Lord is good to all,
And His mercies are over all His works...
The Lord upholds all who are falling
And raises up all who are bowed down.
The Lord is righteous in all his ways
And kind in all his works.
The Lord is near to all who call on him,
To all who call on him in truth.
He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
He also hears their cry and saves them.
The Lord preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy. (Ps.145:8 – 9, 14, 17 – 20)

Israel's exile of three to four generations will be over. The brunt of that exile, which was endured in Babylon by those later generations on no account of themselves, will be finished. So perhaps the particularity of the Sinai covenant itself will end, leaving simply God's *goodness to all*, with healing offered to all through the judgment of God upon the corruption of sin in us. As Moses foresaw, God will circumcise the hearts of people after Israel's exile (Dt.30:6). And as David foresaw, God will have to give us a cleansed heart (Ps.51:10). What was once a desperate prayer for God to place truth in our inmost being (Ps.51:6) becomes confident hope: 'You are good, and you do good; teach me your statutes... with my whole heart I keep your precepts' (Ps.119:68 – 69). God will raise up that which has fallen. God's *goodness to all* is shown precisely in His wrath against the corruption of sin in us, because of His love for us as human beings. When God destroys the wicked (as in 'utterly defeats,' not 'annihilates into non-existence'), it will not be because their parents brought negative consequences on them, but because people will personally reject the goodness God offers. Even without jumping ahead into the New Testament, a

literary approach to the Book of Psalms already strongly suggests that God's goodness is offered chiefly through a healed and perfected human heart that loves Him.

David's heir will gather our praise to God, as our worship leader (Ps.148:11 – 12). His people will be sent out across the world in praise (Ps.149), with the two-edged sword of his praise in their mouths, to execute a form of divine vengeance among the nations, which should now be interpreted within the Book of Psalms as demanding the repentance of all, and severing the people from their allegiances to their rulers, in favor of David's heir. This will pointedly reverse the desires of those rulers to sever themselves from the kingly authority God granted to David (Ps.2:1 – 3; 8 – 12). It will fulfill God's promise to His royal Son to make the nations his inheritance.

Hence, the canonical editor(s) who arranged the Book of Psalms looked ahead to the cleansing of human nature itself by the word/Word of God, offered to all humanity and not just the Jewish community, and connects this with its prophetic hope in the messiah from David's house.

We are now ready to see how Jesus used Psalm 22, not just in isolation, but as part of the entire pre-enthronement story of David, to help us understand his identity.

Aragorn, Heir of Isildur, and Jesus, Heir of David

In J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn labors in the long shadow cast by his ancestor Isildur, a shadow all of Middle Earth hopes will lift one day. Aragorn is King Isildur's heir, heir to the throne. In that sense, Isildur is the archetype – or heroic type – for Aragorn. Yet Isildur is the king who, because he was weak and imperfect, seized the Ring of Power when he had the chance to destroy it. The shadow of evil descended on Middle Earth because of that fateful choice. So in that sense, Isildur is the anti-type – or villain – for Aragorn. Aragorn must walk the path of his ancestor and confront the same evil within himself, but be victorious over it. Whether others knew it or not, their fondest hopes rested on the choices Aragorn would make.

Similarly, David served as both archetype and anti-type to Jesus. He was the anti-type to Jesus in the sense that David, too, gave into the corruption of sin in his fallen human nature. So did every single one of his royal heirs. The simple interpretation of the Book of Kings is: *Once again, this man was not the king we hoped for.* But David was also the archetype for Jesus, his ultimate messianic heir. Jesus, as the true hero of the story, had to retell David's pre-enthronement story – complete with trials, suffering, and rejection – and endure it better than David did.

Unfortunately John Stott does not consider this. Stott's argument goes astray because he thinks Psalm 22:1 has to do with being human in a generic way. Stott says:

'Jesus had been meditating on Psalm 22, which describes the cruel persecution of an innocent and godly man, as he was meditating on other Psalms which he quoted from the cross...'¹⁵

But the first interpretation of Psalm 22:1 is not as a generic human experience, but the specific experience of *David prior to his enthronement*. Jesus was invoking David's journey of rejection before enthronement. His point is that if David suffered at the hands of the Gentiles on his way to the throne (Ps.22), how much more would the heir of David, the one even greater than David?

Consequently, Stott disconnects Jesus from the figure of David, the lineage of David, and the real meaning of that lineage. Stott is, of course, aware that David was God's covenant partner and recipient of God's promise to establish the eternal kingdom on earth through a human descendant. But Stott fails to consider the role of the line of David in relation to *God's ultimate defeat of human evil through David's heir*.

By contrast, N.T. Wright, in his brief treatment of the topic *Evil and the Justice of God*, points out:

¹⁵ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.82

‘The Old Testament isn’t written in order simply to ‘tell us about God’ in the abstract. It isn’t designed primarily to provide information, to satisfy the inquiring mind. It’s written to tell the story of what God has done, is doing and will do about evil.’¹⁶

With this short but very accurate introduction to the Old Testament, Wright positions the goal of God, atonement, ministry, and mission very differently than does Stott. The problem is not God or an attribute of God like His holiness, wrath, or supposedly retributive justice. The problem is not *within God*. It is *within us*: evil. How does God solve the problem of evil, and in particular, human evil? Through the line of David. Wright continues:

‘It is quite clear on the one hand, particularly in the Psalms, that David and his dynasty are to be seen as God’s answer to the problem of evil. They will bring judgment and justice to the world. Their dominion will be from one sea to the other, from the River to the ends of the earth. And yet the writers are all too aware of the puzzle and ambiguity of saying such a thing. The greatest royal psalm, Psalm 89, juxtaposes 37 verses of celebration of the wonderful things God will do through the Davidic king with 14 verses asking plaintively why it’s all gone wrong. The psalm then ends with a single verse blessing YHWH forever. That is the classic Old Testament picture. Here are the promises; here is the problem. God remains sovereign over the paradox. Split the psalm up either way, and you fail to catch the flavor of the entire corpus of biblical writing. God’s solution to the problem of evil, the establishment of the Davidic monarchy through which Israel will at last be the light to the nations, the bringer of justice to the world, comes already complete with a sense of puzzlement and failure, a sense that the plan isn’t working in the way it should, that the only thing to do is to hold the spectacular promises in one hand and the messy reality in the other and praise YHWH anyway.’¹⁷

This is the introduction we need as we look at Jesus with eyes sensitive to his original Jewish context.

Jesus as Son of David in Matthew’s Gospel

In Matthew and Mark, Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 22:1 fits into the sustained parallel Jesus made between himself and David’s pre-en-thronement story, and scholars of various disciplines concur.¹⁸ What are the contours of that parallel? Matthew’s introduction is programmatic for introducing Jesus as ‘Son of David.’ He names Jesus by his identity as ‘Son of David’ right from his genealogy (Mt.1:1, 17), even going so far as to remind us that Joseph was a ‘Son of David’ (Mt.1:20) who passed down to Jesus not just genetic descent from David, which Mary, daughter of David through Nathan, also provided to Jesus (Lk.3:23 – 30), but the title to the Davidic throne, as Joseph was specifically part of the royal line through Solomon. But whereas Moses delivered Israel out of Egypt, and there are striking parallels between Moses and Jesus as well, Jesus as final and true heir of David would deliver Israel out of ‘exile.’ The exile had begun under Babylon (Mt.1:17), but God had not yet reversed it. Jesus would represent Israel in himself, substituting for them his own obedience and faithfulness, to regain the Adamic authority that humanity as a whole and Israel both lost (Mt.28:18 – 20; cf. Dan.7:13 – 14; Gen.1:26 – 28). Of course, Jesus would have to resolve the underlying reason for the primordial, and more fundamental, exile: the corruption of sin within human nature.

Like David, Jesus was anointed king (at his baptism) by John the Baptist who played the role of Samuel as Jesus played the role of David (Mt.3:13 – 17). Like David, after being anointed, Jesus defeated a ‘Goliath,’

¹⁶ N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p.45

¹⁷ *Ibid* p.60

¹⁸ Mark Drury, ‘Mark,’ edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.414 – 416 takes a literary approach; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), and *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016) approaches biblical intertextuality very sensitively as a reader of both Old and New Testaments; Matthew Skinner, *The Trial Narratives: Conflict, Power, and Identity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p.37 – 39 takes a socio-rhetorical approach based on legal culture and narrative portrayals of courtroom trials, and stresses Jesus’ vulnerability to human authority; N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1992), ch.13 takes an historical and biblical approach based on second temple Judaism and early Christianity; Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.156 – 161 takes a cultural-rhetorical approach based on awareness of the rhetoric of shame and honor.

Satan in the wilderness (Mt.4:1 – 11). But unlike David, Jesus never gave into temptation. Jesus succeeded in every area where David was weak. David had a lust for women, especially married women (!); Jesus fought to keep himself totally pure in body, thought, and emotion. David was, at times, overzealous in his self-promotion and the defense of his own honor; Jesus refused the adulation of crowds starting from the satanic wilderness temptation, and turned the other cheek. David demonstrated impatience and seized authority prematurely; Jesus did no such thing, again starting from the wilderness temptation. David exhibited either cowardice or favoritism or both, which led him to fail to rebuke the sins of those closest to him; Jesus never gave in to cowardice or favoritism. Jesus is certainly being portrayed as a greater David, the true ‘royal son,’ beginning with his baptism and wilderness temptation.

Like David, Jesus had to build a kingdom of his own in the wilderness while enduring temptation. Like David, Jesus was chased by those in power with murderous intent, which is why Jesus referred to David’s life on the run in 1 Samuel 21 – 22, when Jesus and his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath (Mt.12:1 – 4; Mk.2:23 – 27; Lk.6:1 – 4). After Jesus made that comparison to David, the wondering crowds make the point, just in case the reader missed it. ‘All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, ‘This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?’’ (Mt.12:23)

In fact, this reference to David taking five loaves from the tabernacle sanctuary serves as an anchor point from which to interpret Jesus’ mirror image miracles of multiplying bread. Jesus took five loaves in Jewish lands (Mt.14:13 – 21; Mk.6:30 – 44; Lk.9:11 – 17; Jn.6:1 – 15) and then seven loaves in Gentile lands (Mt.15:29 – 39; Mk.7:31 – 8:10), and multiplied those loaves. As Mark Drury notes, five, seven, and twelve are Davidic numbers.¹⁹ When David was being hunted and hounded, he went into the tabernacle sanctuary and took five loaves (1 Sam.21:1 – 6) from the twelve which rested in the presence of God (Lev.24:5). Jesus deliberately recalled that episode and, as mentioned above, drew the curiosity of the crowd about his lineage from David. David, anointed king yet fleeing persecution from the established leadership, encountered twelve loaves and took five, leaving seven. Jesus, anointed king yet fleeing persecution from the established leadership, went the other direction numerically: he encountered five loaves and produced twelve basketfuls of bread (Mt.14:13 – 21). The apostle John tells us that the Jewish crowd recognized what we as readers might not understand: Jesus was making a claim to be a king like David, because from that moment, they wanted to make him king by force (Jn.6:15). Not only did Jesus reenact David’s care for his followers by using five loaves, which was a kingly gesture, he performed a miraculous multiplication instead of straight subtraction. Jesus made the loaves become basketfuls. This gesture was not simply the gesture of a claimant to the Davidic throne. It was a claim to be, indeed, something greater than the temple (Mt.12:6) where the bread is merely replenished. Jesus was disclosing himself to be a new temple, a new dwelling place of God, a new source of life who is never depleted.

Not content to leave the seven remaining loaves out of his story, Jesus gathered seven loaves from the second crowd and produced seven ‘large basketfuls’ leftover (Mt.15:29 – 39) – and not ordinary baskets, but unusually large ones, because this crowd, this gesture, and this creational number represented the rest of the world, the Gentiles. In Matthew, Jesus performed these miracles on mountains (Mt.14:23; 15:29; Mk.6:46; Mark curiously omits this detail with the second feeding), which is very significant because mountains invoked Mount Zion and the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was depicting his own statement, ‘Something greater than the temple is here’ (Mt.12:6). What better place to do that but on mountains? Without words, but with actions, Jesus surfaced the link between the heir of David and the rebuilding of ‘the temple,’ so prominent in Jewish hopes of the first century because it was rooted in the Prophets.

In Matthew, Jesus’ second bread multiplication is preceded by an encounter with a Gentile woman who called him by his kingly title, ‘Son of David’ (Mt.15:22). Matthew perceives great significance in this meeting and positions it in a very strategic place literarily. Matthew calls her by her ethnic lineage which a Jewish audience would find striking: Canaanite. Mark, by comparison, identifies her by her geography: Syro-Phoenician (Mk.7:26). Matthew’s choice of identifiers seems motivated by his presumably Jewish or Jewish-Christian audience. The history of Jewish interaction with Canaanites was certainly filled with negative interactions. However, there are positives as well. Tamar (Gen.38) and Rahab (Josh.2; 6) were

¹⁹ Mark Drury, ‘Mark,’ edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.414 – 416

Canaanite woman, and Matthew names them as two of the four women – and unusually so by the standards of the day – in his genealogy (Mt.1:3). Both Tamar and Rahab had unusual hope and faith in God. Tamar’s faith led her to have a child by Judah, even while pointing out the shortcomings of Judah himself, and thus she was firmly incorporated into the tribe of Israel from which Jesus came. Rahab’s faith led her and her family to receive the two Israelite spies, defect from the Canaanite city of Jericho, and become incorporated into Israel via the tribe of Judah also.

The Destruction of the Canaanites in the Old Testament, Re-Envisioned by the Old Testament

Matthew may also be drawing on the model of the Canaanite Gibeonites, which, in the Old Testament canonical development, provide insight into the hopes and expectations assigned to the messianic heir of David. The Gibeonites were a Canaanite tribe who hid their identity at first in order to make a peace treaty with Israel, despite God’s previous instruction to Israel not make any such treaties. Moses said they should instead be ‘utterly destroyed’ (Dt.20:17), which is probably hyperbolic language of victory when compared to Exodus 23:27 – 30, where they are pushed out gradually and not decimated. When found out, the Gibeonites confessed, and Joshua said, ‘You shall never cease being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God’ (Josh.9:23). Joshua bound this Canaanite tribe to *the sanctuary* in which God dwelled. This act is striking. The remainder of the book, Joshua 12 – 24, is a recounting of the land being apportioned to Israel as their inheritance, and Joshua’s closing words. Given their placement in the book of Joshua, the encounter between the Gibeonites and Israel seems to be the high point of the Joshua narrative (Josh.9 – 11).

Matthew is depicting Jesus as a messianic ‘new Joshua’ or ‘greater Moses’ leading a new movement from a mountain to claim his inheritance (Mt.28:16 – 20), which was not land, but people (Ps.2:8). The story of the Canaanite woman immediately preceding the story of the second multiplication of bread among the Gentiles serves as a literary ‘hinge’ in a similar way that Joshua 9 – 11 serves as a literary ‘hinge’ between the first part of the book – which is mainly about battling and incorporating Canaanites – and the second – which is mainly about claiming the inheritance. As Jesus asserts his Davidic identity, prior to his enthronement, he offers himself to the Gentiles and is confessed by them as the messianic king. Consequently, the Gentiles too become servants of the ‘new temple,’ in the ‘new temple,’ Jesus himself.

This pattern also indicates that conversion counted as ‘destruction,’ though not vice versa, has bearing on how we understand Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 22:1 while on the cross as a kingly, Davidic motif. Most books of the Old Testament – Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel most of all – seem to anticipate the same principle of ‘conversion as destruction.’ They say that God will destroy the enemies of Israel, of course. But they also say that He will also circumcise them and make them into priests and Levites of the sanctuary (Isa.66:21) and give them a share of the land inheritance (Ezk.47:21 – 23)! Which means that their old identity is destroyed. Their new identity is to become part of God’s people. That counts as ‘destruction.’

Not only can I make that argument within each of the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; I can make the argument because there is already a literary and theological development in the Pentateuch and Joshua, so that *every book that attaches itself canonically to Moses and Joshua must be read in the same double-meaning-filled, open-ended way*. The understanding of David’s heir and his expected activity reaches astonishing clarity because of this canonical control, helping us see how Jesus retold David’s story. John Sailhamer, an OT scholar who specializes in literary-canonical study of Scripture, following in the canonical approach of the great biblical exegete Brevard S. Childs, argues that the same dynamic is seen in placing Amos and Obadiah together.²⁰ On the face of it, Obadiah simply announces God’s ‘destruction’ of the Edomites. But at the very end of the book of Amos (Am.9:11 – 12), Amos says that ‘*the booth of David*’ will possess the remnant of Edom in the messianic age. How can both be true? How can David’s house possess the remnant of Edom, and yet God destroy all of Edom?

Significantly, the prophecy of Amos seems to have occupied the minds of the Jerusalem Council in 49 or 50 AD, since the apostles and elders at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 interpret the unfolding Christian mission to the Gentiles using the prophecy of Amos; they quote Amos 9:11– 12 in Acts 15:15 – 18. Moreover, not too long afterwards in 53 – 57 AD, the apostle Paul seems to have been reflecting on

²⁰ John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), ch.7

Amos when he wrote 1 Corinthians, which has thematic, literary, and structural parallels to Amos.²¹ If the apostles were accustomed to reading God's promises to Israel as being fulfilled in Jesus as the true Israelite, the Davidic messiah who represented all Israel, then they would have had no problem seeing Jesus as the one who would possess Obadiah's 'mountain of Esau.' But what happened to the Edomites historically and theologically? Obadiah's reference to there being 'no survivor of the house of Esau' (v.18) is curious. King Herod the Great was an Edomite, so the house of Esau was still in existence by the time of Jesus. While it may be true (albeit unlikely) that the descendants of Esau become extinct by the time of Jesus' return, I support another interpretation.

In the New Testament, the principle of 'conversion as destruction' is applied. Paul says to the Corinthian Christians that they are 'no longer Gentiles' (1 Cor.12:2) but that they have become part of 'Israel' and Israel's story (1 Cor.10:1 – 13). Paul refers to the Corinthian Christian as Gentiles no longer (1 Cor.12:2): 'when you were *ethne*.' Henceforth, in Christ, these former Gentiles are part of Israel's story and have become spiritual children of Abraham and Sarah. Indeed, when Paul discusses the Exodus event, he includes the former Gentiles in the family of God: 'Our fathers were all under the cloud' (1 Cor.10:1). Yes, God has destroyed His enemies, quite 'literally,' by turning His enemies into His children. So, too, in Romans: God has made a way to kill 'the old self' (Rom.6:6) of each person, condemning the sin in each person's flesh (Rom.8:3), via the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is surely the most foundational kind of 'destruction.' Hence I believe the Edomites are not ethnically eliminated from the earth in some kind of slow or quick death, but rather lose their previous identity qua Edomites and gain a new identity as the Messiah's possession. So will many other peoples. The vision of Amos interacts with the vision of Obadiah, perhaps because (as I suspect) Obadiah was not as specific as Amos about the fate of Edom. Amos begins with God's judgment upon the nations roundabout the Jews, spilling into the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel, and ends with a reversal: God's restoration of the house of David and its messianic possession of the nations. By placing Amos and Obadiah together, side by side, in a canonical order, the Jewish sages were anticipating that authentic conversion to the messiah would count as the destruction that God intended, even to the extent that the meaning of Amos governs the meaning of Obadiah. What is implicit in Obadiah is made explicit by Amos.

Jesus is the Great Conqueror, Destroyer of Evil

Jesus, as the final and true Son of David, the greater Joshua (Heb.4:8 – 9) whose Hebrew name was, strikingly, 'Joshua,' was not making *an exception* to various Old Testament prophetic passages concerning the 'destruction' of Israel's enemies. Nor was Jesus separating the 'renewal and restoration' side of the prophecies from the 'wrath and destruction' side of *the same prophecies*. 'Dispensationalists' claim Jesus split the prophecies down the middle and fulfilled the former while reserving the latter for later. For instance, in the dispensationalist view, Jesus announced the 'favorable year of the Lord' of Isaiah 61:1 – 2 in the Nazareth synagogue (Lk.4:18 – 19), but not the 'day of vengeance of our God' phrase which follows, but he will return later to do that, having reserved it for a second-stage of prophetic fulfillment. Equally problematic, in my opinion, are those in the 'christocentric hermeneutics' camp, who pursue a variation of the dispensationalist approach. They argue that Jesus simply *ignored and discarded* the unpleasant remainder of the verse like unwanted food at a buffet, as if the Old Testament had little inherent integrity and meaning on its own, and served mainly as raw material from which Jesus chose this or that.

If I am correct, however, in perceiving the converging lines of interpretation in the Old Testament itself, *prior to Jesus*, then Jesus was doing neither, and not splitting the prophecies in two. Rather, Jesus was reading the Hebrew Scripture aright and living out their true and full meaning by calling for, and receiving, the Gentiles' allegiance as his subjects as he was the final 'Son of David.' Jesus did not, for instance, bifurcate his deployment of Psalm 22, intending 22:1 – 21 (cry for God's help) for the cross and 22:22 – 31 (thanks for being vindicated over his enemies) for his resurrection, or ascension, or second coming. Jesus' suffering is the precise means by which he triumphed over his enemies, and 'destroyed' them in the most

²¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011); see my summary and development of Bailey in *The Prophet Amos, the Apostle Paul, and the Preacher Martin Luther King, Jr.: First Corinthians and the Shape of a Proper Liberation Theology*, available online: http://nagasawafamily.org/paul_1corinthians.theme.amos.pdf

fundamental way possible, because he was condemning and destroying the real enemy: the corruption of sin within his own human nature, so he could then destroy it in us.

Why Jesus Quoted Psalm 22: His Social and Political Context

Why did Jesus quote from Psalm 22? What did Matthew see in that event?

Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem for the last time is filled with reminders of his lineage from King David. When Jesus entered Jerusalem (Mt.21ff.), Davidic titles were showered upon him, and he invoked Davidic actions, Psalms, and language himself. Perhaps Jesus was also aware that from the opposite side of the city, Pontius Pilate would have been riding in at some point on a war horse. The donkey was a more humble animal. Also, Jesus knew David fled Jerusalem on a donkey in tragic humiliation when he lost his throne to his son Absalom (2 Sam.16:1 – 2). Donkeys might have served a practical purpose for David in that moment, but it also served to associate David with the failed king Saul, who was associated with donkeys as well (1 Sam.9:3 – 5, 20; 10:2, 14 – 16). Perhaps this is why the prophet Zechariah foresaw that the messianic Son of David would return to Jerusalem on a donkey or donkeys (Zech.9:9), to reverse that particular ignominy suffered by David. Jesus, aware of the prophecy, acted deliberately to fulfill it at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as 'Son of David' (Mt.20:30 – 31). Riding back into Jerusalem on a donkey suggested Jesus was reversing the failures of the kings of the past.

Although Mark, Luke, and John simplify the matter down to the young colt (Mk.11:1 – 7; Lk.19:30 – 34; Jn.12:14), Matthew includes more historical detail of Jesus making use of both a mother donkey and her colt (Mt.21:1 – 5). This detail of two donkeys, not just one, gives us the impression that Jesus went so far as to make sure anyone unfamiliar with Hebrew poetry would recognize that he was fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy. The Hebrew poetic device of representing one idea with two parallel descriptors with increasing specificity²² ('riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey') can be mistaken for two separate ideas put together (two donkeys). Jesus wanted no one to miss his claim to the throne of David. He was the Son of David who reversed the sin of David and brought honor back to the house of David.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowd – who were for the moment enthusiastic cheerleaders – shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!' This quote comes from Psalm 118:26, significant because it is located in the prophetic section of the Book of Psalms, predicting the rise of David's house through the messiah, significant also because the Psalm envisions a new temple with a new cornerstone just a few verses before (Ps.118:22). Jesus, mentally engaged in the same texts, quotes that very vision after he cleansed the temple and challenged the chief priest and elders (Mt.21:42). Just as David became king and provided for a new temple, linking king and temple in a theological nexus that would become the model for Judas Maccabeus in 163 BC, Jesus was declaring his kingship and provision for a new temple-people.

After a vigorous, high-stakes debate with the Jewish leaders about politics, Israel's prophetic destiny, and sacred Scripture (Mt.22:1 – 40), Jesus quoted another prophetic Psalm envisioning God's future promises for the heir of David: the majestic Psalm 110 (Mt.22:41 – 46). Into his crowning riddle, Jesus weaves Psalm 110 – perhaps the clearest vision in the Psalms of the enthroned messiah involving David's conversation with his own messianic heir. After questioning Jesus repeatedly and not being able to defeat his answers, the Pharisees could not 'answer him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day to ask him another question' (Mt.22:46).

Jesus' Polemics and His Use of the David Story in Daniel: You Are the Beasts

Jesus sets a precedent for how he will deploy Psalm 22 in a polemical sense. Surrounded by the high priest and the whole Council (Mt.26:59), pressured to give a statement that would incriminate himself, Jesus uttered the words of Daniel:

'Hereafter you will see 'the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power,' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Mt.26:42; Dan.7:13 – 14)

²² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985), ch.3

Jesus was not simply making a bid on a prophecy. He was, rather, demanding a bold and radical re-interpretation of the entire situation. Jesus said that the Jewish leaders stood in the place of the distorted, grotesque beasts of Daniel's vision (Dan.7:1 – 8). Those warped beasts indicated that God's original creation had gone mad, since their grotesque mixtures of animal body parts violated the creational boundaries of species reproducing 'after its own kind.' They were beasts against which, and through which, the Son of Man emerged victorious and ascended the throne given to him by God.

Daniel's vision reminds us of Adam ruling among the animals (Gen.1:26 – 28; 2:19 – 20) or the young David who was portrayed by the book of Samuel as a new Adam defending his sheep from the wild lion and bear (1 Sam.17:34). Curiously, Daniel's first beast was a lion, the second was a bear, demonstrating a probable awareness of the narrative of David and reinforcing again Davidic themes coalescing around 'the Son of Man.' All this is part of the intertextuality of the Hebrew Scriptures. So Jesus' point was surely not lost upon the Jewish leaders. They tore their robes and declared Jesus' utterance to be blasphemy (Mt.26:65 – 66), even though Jesus' statement was not blasphemy, as it was not a sin to declare one's self the messiah *per se*. But Jesus' statement *was* insulting and challenging, and they simply could not bear it.

Jesus deployed pithy, succinct quotations like any brilliant rhetorician, like Sir Thomas More on trial who wielded Jesus' dire warning, 'It profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world ... but for Wales, Richard?' at the man who betrayed him for power; or Martin Luther King, Jr., who demanded, 'All men are created equal,' and turned the American founding fathers' own words against them and the racist society they founded. Jesus either quoted Scripture verbally or enacted it physically, like in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when he deliberately looked for a donkey and her colt to fulfill the vision of the Davidic messiah in Zechariah 9:9. He was the mastermind, actively enacting some details and drawing other elements into his service by verbal allusion, which repositioned entire scenes, characters, and movements into his own narrative. His was the power to define, and redefine.

Jesus' Polemics and His Use of David's Psalm: David Suffered Rejection, Too

In Matthew, Jesus appears to quote Psalm 22:1 not primarily to express his own emotional state (see below), but rather to respond to his detractors arraigned against him as he hung on the cross. The criminals crucified on either side of him are particularly worthy of note because in Matthew and Mark, they are united in their unbelief and mockery, whereas in Luke, they are divided. In John, they do not appear in the narrative.

³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided up his garments among themselves by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they began to keep watch over him there. ³⁷ And above his head they put up the charge against him which read, 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews.' ³⁸ At that time two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those passing by were hurling abuse at him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him and saying, ⁴² 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God rescue him now, if He delights in him'; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' ⁴⁴ The robbers who had been crucified with him were also insulting him with the same words. ⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?' ⁴⁷ And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' ⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave him a drink. ⁴⁹ But the rest of them said, 'Let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!' (Mt.27:35 – 54)

Crucifixion was a punishment designed to socially humiliate the victim and scare onlookers into obedience. It was, effectively, the Roman Empire's social media tool. In Matthew, the crucifixion narrative takes place as a form of trial or debate over Jesus' claim to be the messianic king from David's line. There are three titles used here, which are presented by Matthew as identical in meaning. The title 'King of the Jews' (Mt.27:37) is straightforward. The title 'Son of God' (Mt.27:40, 43, 54) takes its meaning not from the Nicene-Arian debates about the second person of the Trinity in the fourth century AD, but from Psalm 2:7 in which the anointed Jewish king is said to be the 'Son of God,' begotten that day of his anointing, and from the vision of Chronicles in which Solomon and his heirs 'sat on the throne *of the LORD* as king' (1 Chr.29:23), not merely on the throne *of David*. Chronicles makes the royal 'Son of David' out to be the 'Son of God' quite explicitly. The third title, 'King of Israel' (Mt.27:42), is straightforward, and clearly indicated to be synonymous with 'Son of God' in the voice of the chief priests, scribes, and elders (Mt.27:42 – 43), whose opinion is accepted by Matthew as sufficient on this issue.

The crucifixion scene is therefore the culmination of a clear debate between Jesus and his contemporaries over the meaning the messiah from David's line. Pontius Pilate, needless to say, believed that Jesus' claim to that role is an object of mockery, through which he could further intimidate and shame his Jewish subjects. The chief priests, scribes, and elders, along with the Jewish passersby, and even the two criminals crucified alongside Jesus, taunted him. They believed that the messiah, the greater David, could not possibly be subjected to suffering at the hands of Gentiles like this. Wasn't the messiah supposed to be victorious over the Gentiles, liberating Israel?

By contrast, Jesus was reminding them that king David, in his pre-enthronement period, was exposed to great danger in his early life, too. Jesus seems to have seized upon the callous and mercenary treatment shown to him by the Roman soldiers, and made it serve his own purpose. David in Psalm 22:16 – 18 lamented in poetic voice:

- ¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.
¹⁷ I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me;
¹⁸ They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing they cast lots.

David probably prayed and/or composed these lines while being hunted or besieged. He had been driven from his own home into the wilderness, sometimes into the territories of Gentile warlords. He had been forced to serve foreign households for longer than six years, unable to win his freedom and peace in the seventh year, in an ironic twist on the ear-piercing ceremony of the Hebrew bondsman (Ex.21:2 – 6). David placed himself not in the place of a voluntary bondsman who has his ear pierced against the doorframe of a household he had gladly chosen, but in the place of a terrified man whose hands and feet had been pierced against the doorframe of a household which he had not chosen. By saying he could count all his bones, David meant he had become gaunt with hunger. And his possessions – the last of which would be his clothes – had already been claimed by his enemies as booty or trophies. Even though they did not quite have these goods in hand, David's enemies were nevertheless already dividing them. These words could plausibly fit several episodes of David's life, as far as we know from the book of Samuel.

These words fit Jesus on the cross in a new and intensified way. David's enemies might have been more distant; Jesus' were immediate. To David, being stripped of his last possessions was a menacing threat; for Jesus, the blow was already dealt. The piercing for David was metaphorical; for Jesus the piercing was literal and physical.

- ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided up his garments among themselves by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they began to keep watch over him there. (Mt.27:35 – 36)

Jesus was calling his mockers and enemies to read the entire situation through David's eyes. Jesus had already done the same thing in his trial using Daniel's Son of Man vision, which rests on a Davidic foundation. Jesus threw a verbal stone that shattered their illusion. He demanded that they acknowledge that *they were already playing the role of David's enemies in Psalm 22*.

In fact, Jesus' detractors had, unwittingly or not, *already quoted Psalm 22*. David lamented that his opponents ridiculed him:

⁷ All who see me sneer at me;

They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,

⁸ 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him;

Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.' (Ps.22:7 – 8; emphasis mine)

With delicious irony, Jesus' opponents repeat David's opponents almost verbatim, using those very words from Psalm 22:

⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him and saying, ⁴² 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; *let God rescue him now, if He delights in him'* (Mt.27:41 – 43; emphasis mine)

Jesus perceived the opportunity. He quoted Psalm 22:1 to break their interpretative grip on these events and tear open the veil of their false narrative so they could see the reality. Jesus reconfigured the narrative playing field and sought to convict his detractors of being on the wrong side of the story; they were committing a gross mistake.

⁴⁴ The robbers who had been crucified with him were also insulting him with the same words. ⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?' (Mt.27:44 – 46)

Jesus heard the sentiment and accusations that others hurled at him. He allowed the insults to pile up for hours. He summoned the darkness that represented to the people their own blindness and spiritual state. This darkness contrasts with Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, where the ears and eyes of faith could receive the revelation of divine word, Spirit, and light. Jesus cried out as the only source of God's voice and God's light. Jesus challenged his Jewish audience to re-interpret the situation, placing themselves not in the position of the wise and discerning critics of a failed revolutionary, as they thought they were, but in the position of the very enemies and opponents of the truly anointed king, who would soon be enthroned in power. He deliberately looked for a way to make these details resonate with David's suffering experience to shock people into seeing the startling truth. They were like the ones David wrote about, who mocked him. But the tables will be turned, and the heir of David will soon be enthroned.

Jesus' Polemics in a Culture of Public Honor and Shame

Moreover, given Jesus' cultural context, this is what we would expect from a public figure like Jesus who was thoughtful and strategic about his public statements. Jerome Neyrey, writing with sensitivity about the honor-shame dynamics of the culture of the time, argues that Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1 should not be taken to reflect Jesus' emotional state, but rather as the deliberate prayer of a man who expected to be vindicated after his complaint.

'Culturally sensitive readers must be alert in assessing the cultural meaning of Jesus' dying words so that they do not impose on the ancient world modern notions of emotions. While in our therapeutic and individualistic world we are encouraged to treasure personal emotional display, many ancients held that 'emotions' were weaknesses of the soul; it would be shameful to be overcome by it. In fact, ancient understanding of what it meant to be a person encouraged a distinction between what is displayed for public consumption (and likely public criticism) and what is reserved for private sharing (e.g. Matt.26:38). Even then, we should be aware of the

highly conventional expressions of feeling and emotion, that is, emotion which is socially sanctioned and controlled. Only some emotions may be displayed (e.g. sorrow at death, compassion and pity at misfortune, etc.); others such as 'fear,' if displayed, indicate a lack of virtue and so merit blame, not praise. We mention this because it allows us to sidestep so much of the recent speculation on the emotional importance or personal meaning of Jesus' words (Brown 1994:1043 – 51), which lacks the discipline of culturally contextualizing Jesus' words.²³

Neyrey then examines the function of the Psalms as complaints-petitions that are appropriate and acceptable prayers which would enhance the virtue and esteem of the one praying them, rather than detract. He includes in the social dynamics how a powerful 'patron' is expected to come to the aid of a person who is dependent on that aid, and calls for it (the 'client'). Neyrey continues,

'Thus 'My God, my God...' should not be taken as reflective of a *lack of faith* on Jesus' part or a *weakening of his faithfulness*; rather his dying prayer *protests* the apparent lack of honor shown to him on the part of his Patron. Therefore, Jesus in no way lacks piety by his prayer; rather, he proclaims his piety-faithfulness and calls on the Deity to acknowledge it as well. God, then, is *put on the spot* to give a response of some sort to Jesus. God, who is both Patron and Father, must deal with the shame and reproach of Jesus, son and client, and so deliver an 'answer' or response to Jesus' lament and protest... [T]he events in 27:51 – 54 function precisely as the divine *response* which addresses the reproach suffered by Jesus. God's actions, which speak louder than words, confirm the truth of Jesus' piety and his relationship as a client faithful to his Patron. Therefore, by posthumous honors God vindicates Jesus and thus fulfills his duty as Patron. This honoring, moreover, offsets the terrible mockery and shame which formed the context for Jesus' prayer of lament. And so we should interpret Jesus' complaint-protest as honorable and socially sanctioned speech, which conforms to what is both permitted and even valued in Jesus' cultural world. It embodies Jesus' piety and loyalty, even as it laments a seeming lack of it on God's part. The very fact that God answered his complaint confirms our sense of Jesus' piety, even as it restores his honor.'²⁴

Neyrey offers an important piece of the corrective to Stott's penal substitutionary view. With honor and shame in mind, we can see that Jesus was praying with faith, not despair or loneliness, with which Stott agrees. We can also see that Jesus was honoring the entirety of Psalm 22, which Stott could not fully understand. And we can also see that the Father honored the prayer of the Son, *because the Father never turned against or away from the Son.*

Jesus' Deeper Enemy and Greater Kingdom

Most importantly, once again the original meaning of David's prayer is important. If David was forsaken by God *to the Gentiles*, and *not* forsaken by God in some absolute sense where he was bearing divine retributive wrath, then Jesus, as the much greater heir of David, could also be forsaken by God to the Gentiles, and in a much greater way. If David could come near death, Jesus as the greater David could go into death and out the other side. Like David, Jesus still lived in the power of the Spirit of God, even while quoting Psalm 22:1. Despite his abject suffering and apparent humiliation, Jesus was communicating that he would soon be enthroned and vindicated, just as David was. For like David, Jesus had never lost his anointing to be king.

By that anointing, Jesus was also fighting a deeper enemy: the flesh. The irony of Jesus hearing the words, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself,' is that he saved other people from death, disease, and the demons precisely because he was saving human nature in himself through union with his Holy Spirit. And when he saved his own human nature through death and into resurrection glory, he would offer that salvation to others on the deepest possible levels: from the original exile, the entirety of death, the venom of the serpent, and the corruption of sin (Mt.1:21).

²³ Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.154; Neyrey is critiquing Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave; A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*. 2 volumes. Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994)

²⁴ *Ibid* p.158 – 159 (emphasis his)

Another ironic reversal in Matthew's crucifixion narrative is that a Roman centurion who had participated in crucifying Jesus was the first to acknowledge the truth. None of the Jewish onlookers declared Jesus to be the true king of Israel and the true Son of God, even after the multiple declarations of his innocence, the temple veil tearing, and the troubling natural phenomena. Instead, that honor fell to one of the enemies of Israel. The centurion declared, frightened and astonished, 'Truly this was the Son of God!' (Mt.27:35 – 54). We do not know, unfortunately, what the Roman centurion understood or meant by saying this. Likely, he knew less and meant less than Simon Peter did when he said to Jesus some time ago, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!' (Mt.16:16). But literarily, as Matthew includes this declaration, the stiff wall of resistance put up by Jesus' mockers and detractors started to crumble. The first person to witness Jesus' death and use the title 'Son of God' appropriately was not among the Jewish disciples, and was not even Jewish, but was *Gentile*. And not just any Gentile.

A soldier who had pledged allegiance to Caesar – the Caesar who claimed to be 'the son of a god' himself, who reigned over the mighty Roman Empire – had just uttered a statement remarkably like a confession of faith as Jesus died, and before Jesus was actually enthroned on the seat of David. This centurion did not conclude that Jesus' suffering at the hands of the Gentiles – even his own hands – nullified Jesus' claim to be the messianic heir of David. Far from it. Instead, Jesus' innocence and compassion even during this ordeal affirmed it. So did historical circumstance interpreted theologically according to their own criteria. If by Jewish definition, Israel was under Roman occupation and in exile because they had rejected God, how was this event any different? So Jesus' suffering and death confirmed, rather than disqualified, his claim to be a king. The Jewish crowd went home with the Roman centurion's declaration ringing in their ears. Whether the Roman centurion knew it or not, the Jewish crowd knew it: Jesus' pre-enthronement life looked remarkably like his predecessor, David, in his pre-enthronement life, but with even more holiness, composure, integrity, love, and miraculous power. And the Psalmists' call to the nations to worship the God of Israel had been honored (and perhaps more) by the confession of this Roman centurion. Psalm 22 was the perfect song of David for Jesus to invoke to help his opponents hear and re-interpret what they thought they knew.

Jesus' Trust in the Father, the Father's Presence in the Son

In short, Jesus trusted his Father. He was not despairing or lonely. And the Father had not turned against or away from the Son. Rather, the very nature of the Son was to be a 'temple' (Mt.12:6) through whom the Father made himself known (Mt.11:25 – 27), in whom the Father was always 'well-pleased' (Mt.3:17; 12:15 – 21; 17:5). The Father had empowered Jesus to endure temptation, to fight the corruption of sin within himself, especially from the Jordan event. There, the Father anointed Jesus with the Spirit to lead a very public life as the aspiring king who would be enthroned. The Father never ceased to encourage and affirm Jesus to walk in the way of his predecessor, David, but undo his mistakes. He was present with Jesus during his most challenging moments, as he had been with David. He even helped Jesus engage others with missional love and truth during those darkest moments on the cross.

Perhaps Jesus was also praying the words of Psalm 23:

¹ The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.

³ He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Why Jesus' Atonement Involves the Retelling of Older Stories: He Carried Human Nature

A further unfortunate result of Stott's approach to Jesus' cry is that he obscures Matthew's actual atonement theology. As I argue in what follows, Matthew utilizes the narrative format of atonement called recapitulation, where Jesus 'fills to the full' the narratives and stories before him, stories that previously went unfulfilled because of the failure caused by sin. Within that narrative format of recapitulation lies the medical substitutionary atonement, in which the doctor (God) becomes the patient (Jesus) through his obedience to the rigorous treatment plan (active, not passive, obedience) in order to beat the disease (sinfulness) within himself through death and resurrection (atonement), share himself and his victory with his people (sending of the Spirit).

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130 – 202 AD), student of Polycarp of Smyrna, who was the student of the apostle John, repeated the idea of recapitulation found in the Gospels and Ephesians 1:10 by saying that Jesus 'passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God.'²⁵ In Irenaeus' teaching, human life itself is considered to have an intended, developmental shape, quite naturally from creation, regardless of the fall and notwithstanding it. So Jesus 'passed through every age' because he needed to 'fill' not just human nature as an abstract thing, but human nature in a developmental paradigm. The natural course of a human life is a temple that needs to be filled by God in time, at each stage of life. So Jesus did to his own human life. Here is Irenaeus' famous statement:

'Being a Master, therefore, He also possessed the age of a Master [i.e. thirty years at least], not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race, but sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all through means of Himself – all, I say, who through Him are born again to God – infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise He was an old man for old men, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise. Then, at last, He came on to death itself, that He might be 'the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence [Colossians 1:18],' the Prince of life [Acts 3:15], existing before all, and going before all.'²⁶

This statement undergirds Irenaeus' famous 'recapitulation' theory of atonement.²⁷ We picture the young Jesus of Nazareth listening to Psalms sung by Mary and Joseph, praying to the Father, soaking in the Scriptures read in the synagogue, pondering every word, and piecing together his vocation. Jesus' own human process of learning from childhood to adulthood is glimpsed by Isaiah, Luke, and Hebrews. Once again, the portrait we draw from Scripture is that even in Jesus, human nature is not just a timeless 'thing' that had to be united with divine nature in one instant from which the union remained statically true henceforth. Human nature itself, by definition, required development, growth, and filling. For human nature in each person was designed to be the ground for God to fill each stage of life. Human nature and human personhood are inseparable from personal narrative. Since Jesus claimed to be the true 'temple' of God in his humanity (Jn.2:12 – 25; 14:1 – 3), a humanity that already required a temple-filling pattern of gradual development, then I feel doubly confirmed in this temple Christology. If the creator of human

²⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7

²⁶ *Ibid* 2.22.4; cf. 4.38.2

²⁷ See also Athanasius of Alexandria, *Discourses Against the Arians* 3.51 – 53 in his treatment of Luke 2:52

nature took human nature himself, how much more would he respect his own design? This Irenaean insight about human developmental stages, combined with the assertion above that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature and fought his way through it, leads naturally to an appreciation of Jesus facing age-appropriate challenges connected to bearing fallen human nature and pressing through these biological and relational stages.

Irenaeus explains Jesus' lifelong atoning act as a medical substitution. What human beings were supposed to do, and could not, Jesus did. We were supposed to be faithful and obedient to God, thereby putting to death the corruption of sin in us. But we all failed. Irenaeus says Jesus substituted himself in for us through his active obedience, to perform a medical rescue operation on his own human nature:

'Therefore, as I have already said, He caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become, one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished... But the law coming, which was given by Moses, and testifying of sin that it is a sinner... laid, however, a weighty burden upon *man, who had sin in himself*, showing that he was liable to death... For it behooved *Him who was to destroy sin*, and redeem man under the power of death, that *He should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man*; who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that *sin should be destroyed by man*, and man should go forth from death... What He did appear [i.e. human], that He also was: God recapitulated *in Himself* the ancient formation of man, that *He might kill sin*, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.²⁸

Salvation from Sin

Matthew says that Jesus came to save his people *from their sins* (Mt.1:21). It is very important that Matthew provides us with his own interpretive key to Jesus' person and work right from the start of his narrative. To say that Jesus saves us from *our sins* is different from the later Lutheran-Calvinist idea that Jesus saves us from the *punishment* due to us because of our sins.

God had already delivered to Israel the punishments due their sins (Heb.2:1 – 2). Israel had already been suffering from the exile which began with Babylon (Mt.1:17), and there was no retracting that or undoing the past. And human beings had already been suffering from a more profound exile and death since God expelled us from the garden to protect us from immortalizing the corruption of sin in our bodies by eating from the tree of life (Gen.3:20 – 24). If God was going to bring either form of exile, or both, to an end, and restore us to what He had always intended, He needed to resolve the reason for exile and death in the first place. So the deepest and most profound problem that Jesus needed to solve was the problem of the sin within us. God deals with the source of the problem, not the supposedly punitive consequences that He still reserved behind the achievement of Jesus.

Matthew and the Sinai Covenant

Positioning Jesus within the narrative of Israel and her exile requires a prefatory remark about Matthew's likely understanding of that narrative. At a minimum, Matthew must have understood this: By providing Israel with a good law and a good land, God removed the external factors that fallen human beings since Adam were very likely to scapegoat for their own failures. The Hebrew prophets, appropriately, sought for answers as to why Israel repeatedly failed its side of the Sinai covenant. Time and again, they came to the conclusion that something had gone wrong internal to human beings, within our human nature. This is why the genealogy of Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 displays how Adam and Eve corrupted their human nature, and how Cain corrupted it even further, thereby giving the rather strong impression that our choices can shape our natures; why God diagnosed the human nature of people at the time of Noah as being profoundly corrupted (Gen.6:5 – 6); why the unclean disorder of sinfulness was passed down from parents to children (Lev.12; Ps.51:5); why saying either 'yes' or 'no' to God impacted people's own *human nature* in some profound way, both positively (Ex.34:29 – 35; Dt.4:5 – 8; Prov.1:23; 2:10; 3:3; 6:21; 7:3; 8:22 – 36) and negatively (Ex.7:13; 8:15, 32; 9:34; 19:13 – 25; Dt.5:5; Num.13 – 14; Mt.15:18 – 20; Mk.7:21 – 23; Rom.1:21 – 32; Eph.4:17 – 19); why Moses recognized that obedience to the Sinai covenant commandments would have the effect of cutting something away from human nature that is unclean (Dt.10:16) but ultimately why God

²⁸ Ibid 3.18.7, emphasis mine; see also 2.12.4; 3.18.1; 5.1.3

would have to do it on the other side of Israel's failure and exile (Dt.30:6); and why all the prophets agreed (e.g. Ps.51:9 – 11; Isa.59:21; Jer.4:4; 17:1 – 10; 31:31 – 34; Ezk.11:18; 36:26 – 36; 37:1 – 14). Israel's story of partnership with God and Sinai covenant were designed by God for the purpose of diagnosing the problem with human nature which had occurred at the fall, and documenting the cure God promised. The problem was ontological, not forensic.

Atonement in Matthew means that Jesus carried out the cleansing of his human nature in a human mode, specifically in the narrative of Israel within the Sinai covenant. Jesus recapitulated or 'filled to the full' certain key narratives before him. I am intentionally translating the word which is usually translated 'fulfill' (πληρωθῆναι) as 'fill to the full.' Passages from the Hebrew Scriptures are applied to Jesus in such a way that he is said to 'fulfill' them even though they are not 'predictive' per se. A good example of this is Matthew 2:15 where Matthew narrates Jesus' family's return from Egypt to the land of Israel and says that the phrase 'Out of Egypt I called My Son' from Hosea 11:1 was 'fulfilled' by Jesus, even though Hosea was not making a prediction! He was simply narrating God bringing Israel out of Egypt. But since Jesus was recapitulating Israel's story, or 'filling it to the full,' he replays in his own life key moments in Israel's history like the exit from Egypt.

Like Israel, Jesus was truly descended from Abraham (Mt.1:1). Jesus was persecuted by a maniacal ruler in a manner similar to how Pharaoh of old slew the Israelite boys of Moses' generation (Mt.2; Ex.1). He came out of Egypt like Israel did (Mt.2; Ex.2 – 12). The parallel continued further. Jesus went through the waters of his baptism like Israel went through the Red Sea (Mt.3:13 – 17; Ex.13 – 15). He went through forty days in the wilderness like Israel went through forty years (Mt.4:1 – 11; Num.13 – 14), showing by his three quotations of Deuteronomy that he was reflecting on that very period of Israel's history. He gathered others around himself just as Israel gathered a mixed multitude from Egypt (Mt.4:12 – 25; Ex.12:49). He came to a mountain like Israel came to a mountain, but chose to go to the top of the mountain where Israel did not (Mt.5:1ff.; cf. Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5), both to give and receive the law into his human nature. Matthew even makes a large, doubled literary allusion to the Ten Commandments not only in the 'you have heard...but I say' formula of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:29) but in what follows afterwards: Jesus did ten miracles of healing by his word (Mt.8:1 – 9:35), showing that God's commands were always for our healing.

Matthew and the Pentateuch

Since the Pentateuch is the charter document of Israel, Matthew appears to have structured his narrative like the Pentateuch, around five blocks of the teachings of Jesus. Each literary unit ends with a particular narrative formula denoting closure of a speech:

When Jesus had finished these words (Mt.1:1 – 7:29)

When Jesus had finished giving instructions (Mt.8:1 – 11:1)

When Jesus had finished these parables (Mt.11:2 – 13:53)

When Jesus had finished these words (Mt.14:1 – 19:1)

When Jesus had finished all these words (Mt.19:3 – 26:1)

The literary allusion to Israel's Pentateuch is reasonably straightforward. It is not that each of Matthew's five sections of Jesus' teaching matches one of the five books of Moses; the literary parallel does not quite work that way. But there is a sense that Jesus' person, work, and word constitute a new covenantal foundation for a renewed Israel. For Matthew to organize it this way simply draws attention to Jesus' claim to be Israel reconstituted, for Israel's own – and the world's own – sake.

In fact, Matthew brings his Gospel to a close with a scene very much like the ending of the Pentateuch. Jesus was on a high mountaintop in Mt.28:18 – 20, like Moses was on a high mountaintop in Dt.34. Jesus was overlooking a vast inheritance, just like Moses was overlooking the inheritance back then. But this time, Jesus was not dying alone on the mountain; his death and resurrection had already occurred; and now Jesus was leading his people out to conquer, not land, but people's hearts, as his inheritance. So he says to his disciples, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe *all that I commanded you*': A fitting conclusion for a teaching manual well-designed to produce and reproduce Christian disciples. Jesus' mission thematically builds upon Israel's spreading throughout the garden land,

which itself builds upon Adam and Eve's spreading the garden throughout the land. No surprise: He is God's new humanity, or rather renewed humanity, for all humanity, bringing human beings back into the original creation order.

The key question underlying Matthew's conception of atonement is how Jesus was acting upon his own human nature as he bore it from conception to resurrection. Because 'circumcision of heart' had become the inner meaning behind Israel being restored from exile (Dt.30:6), and because Jesus himself substituted himself in for Israel and was restored from exile in his resurrection on behalf of Israel, then it follows quite logically and of necessity that he is the one who became 'circumcised of heart.' In other words, the Sinai covenant with its commandments did not serve an adversarial role God took against Israel. Rather, it served a medical, even surgical, role as God was prescribing the demanding spiritual health regimen that Israel needed to be cured of sinfulness. Thus Jesus was not a penal substitute in his *passive* obedience at the cross, but a medical substitute in his *active* obedience throughout his life culminating at his cross and resurrection. We can look at Jesus from the vantage point of his humanity, specifically his Jewish humanity. If Jesus entered into the place of Israel, then he recapitulated not only Israel's early journey, he completed Israel's appointed task which Israel could not do: he circumcised his heart by pressing the law deeply into his own humanity and cutting away from it that which should never have lodged there (Dt.10:16). As man, he cut off the unclean aspect of his human nature; he put it to death. He fulfilled Israel's side of the covenant to God. And if Jesus, in himself, circumcised something away from himself at his death (Rom.6:6), then Jesus must have taken on *fallen* humanity, not an already perfected or pre-fall humanity. The fulfillment of God's long covenant with Israel logically requires Jesus' full identification with Israel's fallen condition.

But we can also look at Jesus from the vantage point of *God's* covenant faithfulness to Israel. Jesus did not only recapitulate Israel's side of the covenant, he recapitulated God's side as well. As God pronounced blessings from creation (Gen.1:26 – 28) and both blessings and curses to Abraham (Gen.12:1 – 3) and to Israel (Dt.27 – 29), Jesus pronounced both blessings (Mt.5:1 – 12) and curses (Mt.23:1 – 39). Jesus performed ten miracles by his word (Mt.8:1 – 9:35), like God uttered ten words in the creation story of Genesis 1, ten words on Egypt, and ten commandments with Israel. Other parallels to the Pentateuch abound attesting to Matthew's understanding that Jesus is fully divine, fully God. All this reminds any sensitive reader of Israel's story in the Pentateuch. God alone could 'fill to the full' the demand and promise of the law in the Sinai covenant. Or, put another way to make the same point, He alone could fill to the full the vocation of Israel. If Jesus entered into the place of Israel, the divine one who carried Israel's humanity upon his shoulders, then and only then did God actually do what He said He would: circumcise the heart of *Israel* (Dt.30:6, cf. 29:4). That is, the Word of God inscribed His law on a human heart. That simultaneously means that God was faithful to the covenant to produce a humanity that is restored from exile and resurrected into the intended life of the garden paradise (Dt.30:1 – 6).

Given constraints of time and space in this essay, I will treat only briefly the major sections in Matthew to see how each supports the medical substitutionary atonement paradigm which undergirds the whole life of Christ.

Section One of Matthew

In Matthew's first section, 1:1 – 7:28, we are introduced to the deeper dynamics of Jesus' internal life, and how he undid the failures of Israel's internal life. I have already discussed the theological significance of Matthew introducing us to Israel in exile (Mt.1:1 – 17), how it demanded an explanation centered around the fallen status of Israel's human nature, and its healing. Mention must also be made, along that line of reasoning, about Mary of Nazareth. Matthew presents Mary as virginal, but otherwise just like any other Israelite, which means, fully participating in fallen Adamic humanity. Matthew knows nothing of Mary's supposedly immaculate conception and purified humanity, a later Roman Catholic intrusion that confuses the matter.

Jesus as an adult knew he needed to be baptized. Baptism itself represented God cleansing and renewing humanity, based as it was in the story of God bringing life out of the waters (Gen.1:3), the flood waters (Gen.9), and the Red Sea's waters (Ex.14), and promising cleansing Edenic waters again (Ezk.36:25; 47 – 48). Passing through water indicated one's own creation and exodus experience. For Jesus to request

baptism, then, was surprising, as John the Baptist attested. Did the messiah need to be cleansed, or to represent himself as needing cleansing? Apparently so, because he was carrying the same human nature we had. If he came in the likeness of men (Phil.2:7), then he came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom.8:3). Jesus therefore submitted to the rite, in effect exposing human nature as requiring cleansing via death and resurrection, and confessing its sinfulness for us and our salvation.

Jesus also knew he needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of the Father to begin his public messianic ministry. John the Baptist had depicted baptism of the Spirit as involving divine fire (Mt.3:11). The Spirit, then, is depicted as light, and Jesus subsequently declared himself to be God's long-looked-for light (Mt.4:16), extending the honor of being light-bearers to his disciples by extension (Mt.5:14 – 16; 6:22; 25:1 – 13). At a pivotal moment in the narrative, Jesus repeated the baptismal motif and the blessing of the Father. He revealed himself in transfigured light, in a fuller disclosure of himself by the Spirit (Mt.17:1 – 13). He did this on a mountain, evoking the experience of Moses on a mountain with God in more than just a physical repeat of the phenomenon. Jesus transfigured his humanity with the divine fire of the Spirit to show his end-goal: to perfect the union of human nature and God's Spirit in his own body, through his faithful obedience unto the Father, so that he could share the Spirit of his new humanity with us.

Rather than give into temptation in the wilderness, or at any point in his life, Jesus succeeded in resisting every temptation. Rather than resist God at Mount Sinai, Jesus *continued to receive* the law fully into his own humanity as he gave the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5 – 7). What Jeremiah longed to see – God writing His law on the human heart (Jer.31:31 – 34), to rewrite the sin inscribed there (Jer.17:1 – 10) and circumcise the uncleanness away (Jer.4:4) – Jesus first did in himself. Jesus' commandments for the human heart must be understood as part of the prophetic hope for God to change the human heart. Thus, Jesus declared that blessed are the pure in heart (Mt.5:8); do not harbor anger in one's heart (Mt.5:21 – 26); do not lust for that is adultery in the heart (Mt.5:28); your Father sees your secret, heart motives (Mt.6:4, 6, 18); what you treasure determines your heart (Mt.6:21); the false prophets are inwardly ravenous wolves who have not allowed Jesus to transform their hearts (Mt.7:15). As he lived and taught, and went to his death and resurrection, Jesus was perfecting this human heart for us. He will return to this topic.

In these ways and more, Jesus filled to the full the story of Israel. He used Israel's story as a template, into which he poured the content of his own life and teaching. But because he surpassed Israel's previous life, he burst the boundaries of the previous narrative – especially as regards the Sinai covenant – so he could fill it to overflowing. At every point in his own life, Jesus succeeded where Israel failed, because Jesus succeeded on behalf of Israel, for Israel could only ultimately fail because they shared in the corruption that had set in to all Adamic humanity since the fall. Finally, Jesus, like Israel, went through the exilic experience – suffering pain, humiliation, and death at the hands of the Gentiles. And first among all Israel, and actually *as Israel*, Jesus emerged in his resurrection on the other side of exile.

Section Two of Matthew

In the second section (Mt.8:1 – 11:1), Matthew organizes ten miracles of Jesus into two chapters. Just as God spoke ten words to bring Israel out of Egypt, so in Matthew 8:1 – 9:38, Jesus does ten miracles by his word to bring humanity out of sickness, demonic oppression, and death. Jesus quotes one of the greatest atonement texts in the Old Testament – Isaiah 53:4 – in the context of healing disease, not receiving punishment.

Matthew seems to group these miracles together in a way that is not strictly chronological. Mark and Luke record these miracles as well, but spread them out in different places in Jesus' ministry, and sometimes in a different order from Matthew. I believe Matthew does this to highlight a parallel between Jesus' ten miracles and other sequences of ten utterances from God. Matthew is clearly aware that there is already a pre-existing pattern around the number ten concerning God's activities in the history of Israel. Here is that pattern:

Ten Acts Leading Up to a New Work of God

- Genesis 1:1 – 2:3: Ten declarations in creation; God forms all life
- Genesis 5:1 – 6:1: Ten generations from Adam to Noah; God brings about a new creation (Noah and his wife are a new version of Adam and Eve; creation cleansed through water and Spirit)

- Genesis 11:10 – 30: Ten generations from Shem to Abram; God brings about a new humanity (Abraham and Sarah are a new version of Adam and Eve)
- Genesis 2:4 – 50:26: Ten genealogies from creation to Israel; God forms the nation Israel
- Exodus 7 – 11: Ten plagues on Egypt; God frees Israel from bondage
- Exodus 19 – 20: Ten commandments; God shapes Israel through the Sinai encounter
- Matthew 8 – 9: Ten word miracles; Jesus frees people from death, disease, demons

In effect, Matthew's parallel extends even before the Exodus and the Ten Commandments. That is because those incidents from Exodus were already referring to Genesis. God was making Israel into his new humanity, who lived in a garden land like the original humanity. Ten utterances from God bring forth new life; they inaugurate a covenant; they set free and liberate; they order and declare. They demonstrate God's power to do all these things. Thus, when we listen to Jesus' teaching on our hearts, may we receive his word with the understanding that his word contains his power to change us. Jesus brings forth new life in us; he sets free and liberates us from our sin; his word orders and declares a new spiritual reality.

Here is the structure of this section:

1. Miracle 1 (8:1 – 4): 'Jesus...touched him, *saying...*'
2. Miracle 2 (8:5 – 13): 'Just say the *word*'
3. Miracle 3 (8:14 – 17): 'He cast out the spirits with a *word*'
4. Teaching 1 (8:18 – 22): Jesus requires everything
5. Miracle 4 (8:23 – 27): 'He... *rebuked* the winds and the sea'
6. Miracle 5 (8:28 – 34): 'He *said* to them, 'Go!''
7. Miracle 6 (9:1 – 8): 'He said to the paralytic...'
8. Teaching 2 (9:9 – 17): Jesus has come to heal sinners
9. Miracle 7 (9:20 – 22): 'Jesus turning and seeing her *said...*'
10. Miracle 8 (9:18 – 19, 23 – 26): 'He *said*, 'Leave, for the girl has not died''
11. Miracle 9 (9:27 – 31): 'He touched their eyes, *saying...*'
12. Miracle 10 (9:32 – 34): 'the demon was cast out, the mute man *spoke*'
13. Teaching 3 (9:35 – 38): More workers for the harvest!

Matthew begins this section with the phrase 'stretched out his hand.' That is a classical Jewish way of describing the power of God. It referred to God delivering Israel out of Egypt (Ex.3:20; 7:5; Ps.136:12; 138:7). Here we see the full character of God's outstretched hand. It is Jesus' hand, reaching out to deliver a man from leprosy. The phrase is a trigger, helping a Jewish reader think of God's mighty Exodus deliverance through the ten plagues.

This phrase, 'Jesus stretched out his hand' (Mt.8:3), is a significant literary marker calling for our attention. Jesus demonstrated power unlike anything Israel had ever seen, power that surpassed what was demonstrated in the Exodus. He liberated people – both Jew and Gentile – from disease, demons, and death. Jesus worked within the long-held Jewish views that originate in the Pentateuch about how human biological disorders portray human sinfulness, as in general fallenness, not personalized guilt. Jesus was restoring humanity to what God meant us to be. These acts were outward pictures of Jesus liberating people from the even deeper problem of human sin, evil, and resistance to God. The three lessons on discipleship woven into the ten miracles suggest that Jesus' call for disciples to follow him should be understood as his way of healing us.

Also, Matthew condenses his narration of these miracle stories to highlight Jesus' word. For example, in the demoniac story in Mark, Jesus engages in a longer process of exorcism through repeated questions and commands (Mk.5:8 – 9). But in Matthew, Jesus says one word, 'Begone!' and expels the demons into the pigs. Similarly, in both Mark and Luke, the hemorrhaging woman touches Jesus' cloak and then tries to hide in the crowd (Mk.5; Lk.8). But in Matthew, there is no touch; Jesus simply turns around, speaks, and heals her (Mt.9:22).

Hebrew biblical narrative and common sense allow a narrator to leave out information, but not to make up anything. Matthew took the stories about Jesus, which circulated orally and were recorded in extended forms by Mark and Luke, and compresses them to make his emphasis clear: Jesus heals by his word.

Matthew also provides a fairly robust account of Jesus' teaching, by contrast. And these two literary decisions relate to each other.

Jesus' word heals us by destroying disease. The word-miracles suggest that the works which Jesus did in others' bodies represented what he was doing within his own human nature. In medical substitution atonement, Jesus' miracles serve as illustrations of the atonement itself. The shift from the penal substitution paradigm where God's love and God's wrath are directed at the same object, to the medical substitution paradigm where God's love is directed at our personhood and our nature while God's wrath is directed at the corruption within our nature, makes all the difference. God is like a surgeon wielding a circumcision knife, whose wrath is directed at the cancer in us, while His love is directed at us. God is like a metalworker whose wrath is directed at the dross mixed in with the gold of who we are, while His love is directed at the gold. When Jesus healed the bodies of others, he showed his wrath against the people, but against the diseases, disorders, demons, and death; and he showed his love for the people themselves.

Moreover, the ten miracles continue to look back to both Mt.1:21 and Mt.5:1 – 7:29 to interpret salvation from sin and heart transformation, respectively, as God's healing, cleansing, and restorative work. Through his spoken word, and especially in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains and expositis what he was doing to his own human nature. His heart level transformation, Jesus says, is how he saves his people from their sins (Mt.1:21). God is like an addiction counselor whose wrath is directed verbally at the addictions in us, while His love is directed at us. Jesus' teaching purifies us.

Even more significant is Matthew's use of Isaiah 53:4 in one specific place where he quotes it in the midst of these ten word-miracles (Mt.8:17). I have explored this citation in some length elsewhere.²⁹ Matthew, by quoting Isaiah 53:4, 'He himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases,' links atonement, which separates human beings from sinfulness, and physical healing, which separates human beings from disorders. Matthew strongly suggests that Isaiah, and behind Isaiah, Leviticus, are meant to be taken in a medical and surgical paradigm. That is, God's presence in the sacrificial system of Israel culminating in the day of atonement (Lev.16) should be understood as acting like a modern-day dialysis machine, receiving our impurities and giving back purified life-blood. By extension and by association, Isaiah's portrait of the Suffering Servant in the idiom of that sacrifice (Isa.53:4 – 10) should also be understood in terms of the Servant sharing our disease in order to defeat it, that we might share in his healing. As Isaiah connected the suffering of the Suffering Servant to *sharing in, not deflecting, Israel's exilic suffering*, so Matthew seems to also want us to understand Jesus of Nazareth as suffering from his sharing in Israel's *exilic suffering*. That had concrete physical, material, emotional, and relational consequences for Jesus, from his infancy through his adulthood. Because Israel's exile was a microcosm of Adam and Eve's exile, and a further examination of corrupted human nature universal to all, but under conditions of the Sinai covenant, there is a relation between exilic Israel and fallen humanity writ large. Jesus shared in Israel's and Adam's fallen humanity, that we might share in his healed humanity. The story of Jesus can therefore be organized, as Matthew has done, around Jesus sharing in our exile, that we might share in his restoration from exile.

Section Three of Matthew

In the third and fourth sections (Mt.11:2 – 13:58; 14:1 – 19:2), Matthew focuses on how Jesus also 'filled to the full' the story of David. Like David, he grew up in relative obscurity. Like David was anointed to be king by the prophet Samuel, Jesus was anointed to be king by the prophet John the Baptist (Mt.3:13 – 17). Like David fought Goliath, Jesus fought a giant in the wilderness (Mt.4:1 – 11). The overlap in stories between David and Israel is remarkable, and already present in the narrative of Samuel. Both Israel and David were portrayed and understood by the biblical narrators as a partial restoration of Adam. David was portrayed as a young man as among the beasts (1 Sam.17:34 – 37), like Adam was among the beasts. And David was promised a reign over the whole creation (2 Sam.7:16; Ps.2:8 – 12), as Adam once had dominion over the whole creation. Thus, Jesus could reference both at once.

²⁹ See Mako A. Nagasawa, *Isaiah 53 Series*: <http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/resources.neviim.isaiah.htm>, especially *Matthew's Quotation of Isaiah 53:4 and Isaiah's Understanding of Israel's Sacrificial Animals*

Jesus also shared specifically in *David's pre-enthronement exile and his suffering*. Like David was hunted and persecuted by the powers that be, so Jesus was (Mt.12:1 – 4; cf. 1 Sam.21:1 – 9). Like David gathered a following while being pursued, so Jesus did, too.

Section Four of Matthew

Like David took five loaves of bread to feed his people (1 Sam.21), so Jesus took five loaves of bread to feed his people (Mt.14:13 – 23). But Jesus was the heir of David who was greater than David. He used the five loaves to feed far more people than David ever did. He used seven other loaves, symbolic of the seven loaves that David left behind in the tabernacle, and fed Gentiles and not just Jews (Mt.15:29 – 39), which is several orders of magnitude beyond David.

Just as David built the temple in Jerusalem, so Jesus built the new temple of his body, joined by the Spirit to his followers. Just as David lamented apparently being driven out of his home and into the dangers of the Gentile warlords in Psalm 22, so also Jesus lamented being hunted and mocked and wished for dead when he quoted Psalm 22 from the cross to prove to those around him that the messiah greater-than-David would suffer more than David on his way from exile to enthronement. Jesus used David's story as a template, into which he poured the content of his own claims to the throne of king David. As the greater David, Jesus' exposure to the police brutality of the reigning Gentile powers was greater. But because he surpassed David's previous life, he burst the boundaries of the previous narrative – especially in undoing David's failures and shortcomings – so he could secure the truly expansive nature of the Davidic covenant through which God promised to bring forth a Davidic king for the whole world.

Not coincidentally, placed in between the two bread miracles, which were themselves acted references to the temple, is Jesus' direct commentary about the temple. Jesus preserved the association between king and temple from Jewish history and the Hebrew Scriptures, but took it in a new direction. Jesus expressed dissatisfaction with the way the Jewish leaders have elevated the temple beyond what was appropriate, and distorted its meaning (Mt.15:1 – 20). Connected to this rebuke, Jesus warned about the human heart (Mt.15:18 – 20). Not only is it the source of sin, evil, and uncleanness, the heart can further pollute the person from within. The temple and the human heart serve as mirror images of each other. For the ultimate purpose of the human heart, from creation, is to be the place where God dwells by His Spirit. The prophets saw this and hoped for the day (e.g. Isa.59:21; Ezk.11:18; 36:26 – 36; Joel 2:28 – 29; etc.). But the heart needed to be cleansed, in some manner that God's presence in the temple served as a foreshadowing, to portray.

This development confirms retrospectively that God always wanted a temple-people, not a people with a temple. Remarkably, this can be seen in the Pentateuch itself,³⁰ as well as in Isaiah's prophecy which Jesus quoted. 'This people honors Me with their lips...' (Isa.29:13) is part of the same discourse as, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed' (Isa.28:16). This discourse in Isaiah must be integrated with Isaiah's messianic prophecy, 'Then He shall become a sanctuary; but to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem' (Isa.8:14) and its context as well. Jesus was not quoting piecemeal verses. He was evoking all of Isaiah's prophecy and putting forward a case for interpreting all of it. And, according to the Pentateuch, the sanctuary was God's way of providing uncorrupted life-blood which purified and cleansed the sanctuary itself, the land on which it sat, its furniture, and the people of the covenant. Since Jesus was making his case to be 'something greater than the temple' (Mt.12:6), he was also filling to the full its role and function.

How will Jesus cleanse the human heart? What will he do with the temple? The narrative answers those questions and more as it progresses. After giving these clues relating to bread, David, and the temple, Jesus shows that he himself will be God's new temple. He transfigures his humanity on a mountain, enveloped in a cloud of glory (Mt.17:1 – 13). He retells the story of God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, but takes it further. Whereas Moses' face shone because of his encounter with God on the mountain, Jesus'

³⁰ See Mako A. Nagasawa, *Literary Analysis of the Pentateuch*: <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-pentateuch-chiasm.pdf>. In brief, God had wanted Israel to come up onto the mountain (Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5) and to encounter Him like Moses did (Ex.34). This might have made them a 'temple-people.' Since they did not, they became a people with a temple.

entire human body shone with a brighter light, showing that God had always wanted to place His life within people, from the garden of Eden. The bright cloud of God's glory was a reminder of the powerful manifestation of God from the exodus event, and perhaps a glimpse of how God walked in the garden originally with Adam and Eve. The Father repeated his blessing-declaration from the baptism, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased' (Mt.17:5; cf.3:17), which also repeats a very phrase from Isaiah, quoted when Jesus declared himself to be greater than the temple: 'My beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased' (Mt.12:18). This shows the Father's pleasure and delight in Jesus, in particular upon his active obedience and faithfulness to offer his human nature constantly back to the Father, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be cleansed and re-stamped with the life of God.

Section Five of Matthew

In the fifth section (Mt.19:3 – 26:1), the opening stories deal with Jesus' renewal of God's good creation, before sin entered the story. The Pharisees put the question of divorce to Jesus. Jesus answered by referring to God's original design for marriage, from creation, before 'hardness of heart': 'He who created them from the beginning... Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning' (Mt.19:4, 8). If Jesus was re-issuing marriage in the creational mode in which it was designed, then he must be taking away or healing 'hardness of heart.'

A brief encounter with children allows Jesus to comment on the need for a new birth to enter the kingdom as children (Mt.19:13 – 15). Then, the rich young ruler's approach gives Jesus occasion to speak of financial and economic sharing (Mt.19:16 – 30). He declares a radical ethic of generosity and sharing, to which the disciples reflect on the fact that they have, in fact, left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus replies that 'in the regeneration' (Mt.19:28), that is, in the new creation, the re-genesis of all things, which begins with Jesus, they will sit on thrones judging Israel – which I take to mean that they will be the benchmark against which other believers will be held up.

My brief treatment of these two stories which open the fifth section indicate that Jesus was framing his ministry as taking away 'hardness of heart' which set in after the fall. Jesus was, in effect, declaring by his ethics that he was re-issuing God's commands from the creation, before the fall. In order to be doing this, he must have understood the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:29), as he addressed the human heart quite extensively there, to convey the re-genesis, renewal, and healing of the human heart, and the power we would need to live out his commands. He must also have understood his own humanity, through his death and resurrection, to be the ontological foundation for why we would be able to follow him thus.

Paralleling his ten miracles of healing by his word, Jesus now fields ten challenging questions from his opponents. He defeats them, either through exposition of Scripture, or political logic and savvy. The last of the ten questions is Jesus'. He turns the tables on his opponents.

Ten Questions between Jesus and His Opponents in Matthew 19:3 – 22:46

1. 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?' (19:3)
2. 'Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce...?' (19:7)
3. 'Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?' (19:16)
4. 'Who is this?' (21:10)
5. 'Do You hear what these children are saying?' (21:16)
6. 'By what authority... and who gave You this authority?' (21:23)
7. 'Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?' (22:17)
8. 'In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be?' (22:27)
9. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' (22:36)
10. Jesus asked them a question: 'The Christ, whose son is he?' (22:42)

The conclusion to all this questioning is that, 'No one was able to answer him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask him another question.' (Mt.22:46)

Overlapping with these ten questions are ten subject areas. Jesus discusses these subjects to sharply distinguish himself and his followers from the Jewish leadership of the time:

Ten Disagreements between Jesus and the Jewish Leadership in Matthew 19:3 – 22:46

1. Concerning creation, marriage, divorce, and singleness (19:4 – 8)
2. Concerning creation, generosity, and the ten commandments (19:18 – 19)
3. Concerning the messiah's return to Jerusalem (21:1 – 4)
4. Concerning the temple (21:13)
5. Concerning praise for the Son of David (21:15 – 16)
6. Concerning Israel as God's vineyard (21:33)
7. Concerning the chief cornerstone of the New Temple (21:42 – 44)
8. Concerning the resurrection (22:30 – 32)
9. Concerning the Law and the Prophets (22:35 – 39)
10. Concerning the Davidic king (22:41 – 46)

These ten disagreements serve to highlight Jesus' claim to 'fill to the full' the story and role of Israel itself. Not only was Jesus returning the human heart to its non-hardened state, which was what Israel could not do. And not only was Jesus identifying himself as the supreme interpreter of Israel's Scriptures through these ten declarations. He was also marking out the implications for Israel's leadership and institutions. Thus, since Jesus fulfilled the role of the temple in himself, the Jerusalem temple had served its purpose and was obsolete (Mt.23 – 24). And henceforth, internalizing Jesus' word would serve to constitute God's people and Christian mission (Mt.25).

Section Six of Matthew

The climactic section of Matthew (Mt.26:2 – 28:20) uses rich Old Testament symbolism to convey what Jesus did in atonement. The theme of recapitulation – of 'filling full' – continues.

The act of eating bread and wine itself recapitulates the exodus-passover motif of celebrating deliverance. In the exodus-passover, the Israelites marked their doorways with the blood of the lamb, and went out through it. Thus, the imagery involved returning to the promised garden land in and through the life of another. Standing behind the exodus, and also standing before it in a partial way, is creation. God was recalling Israel back into the creational motif of eating with God in the garden once again.

In and through the life of Jesus, the restored human, God returns His people to the garden land. Hence, Jesus wanted us to remember the journey of his physical body and blood throughout his birth, life, death, and resurrection. He did not position his body and blood simply in relation to his death alone. Why? Because God's healing for humanity is physically located in his body. Scripture indicates that all of us have a poison in our bodies, a disorder of self-centeredness where we desire and seize God's prerogative to define good and evil. We need healing from it. The reason why God became a human being named Jesus was to acquire our disease, and have a human body in which to humanly obey the Father and thus develop the antidote to the disease. In the physical body of Jesus, God resisted every shred of self-centeredness living in that body, pushing it all the way to its death. And by rising from the dead, Jesus received a purified, renewed, and glorified humanity perfectly fused with the divine. He cleansed his humanity to fulfill the Sinai covenant, circumcising his heart (Dt.10:16; Jer.4:4) and producing in himself the circumcised heart God could share by his Spirit with all his followers (Dt.30:6), thus bringing about our 'restoration from exile.' God made Jesus into an 'organ donor' spiritually. By connecting us to the resurrected Jesus spiritually, God can now place in us Jesus' cleansed spirit, new spiritual heart, and love for the Father. To sum up: In the physical body of Jesus, God worked out the healing to our disease so that we could all share in that healing by His Spirit.

When we eat the broken bread, we think of the brokenness that Jesus endured at his climactic death, as well as the struggles that led up to it. When we drink the wine made from crushed grapes, we think about Jesus pouring out his life, bearing the burden of our condition, at his death, certainly, but also throughout all of his life until then. When we put bread and wine into our mouths and swallow them so they can nourish us and become part of us, we remember that Jesus invested his own personhood into the physical creation via his human body. We also remember that we need Jesus' life – what he did throughout his life, death, and resurrection – to nourish and sustain us by his Spirit. This bread and wine – and for that matter, all the food that we eat – is our holy reminder to internalize the new heart and new life from our spiritual organ donor, Jesus. By him in us, we are made new.

Especially at the end of his life, Jesus endured elements of exile from the Hebrew Scriptures. By enduring all this, he recapitulated 'exile,' and came out the other side. Here are those elements, which we are to remember.

First, Jesus was stripped and mockingly handed a scarlet robe. Being stripped was shameful for Jews, ever since the day Adam and Eve sinned, realized they were naked, and felt ashamed. Since that time, the people of God considered proper attire to be fairly important. But the Romans stripped Jesus. In place of his own clothes, the Roman soldiers gave him a scarlet colored robe (an inner tunic, not the same as the outer purple cloak described by Mark and John). Scarlet was a color associated with sin according to Isaiah (Isa.1:18). Ironically, Jesus, who had struggled successfully all his life to live fully in the love of his Father, had the color of sin placed on him. But it was also appropriate in a deeper way: Jesus had taken onto himself the sinful fallen humanity common to us all, and this scarlet robe symbolized that.

Second, Jesus wore a crown of thorns. Thorns were also an emblem of humanity's fall into sin (Gen.3:17 – 19). Thorns were the painful result of Adam and Eve's rejection of God, as God withdrew His life-giving presence somewhat from creation. Ever since then, humanity's attempts to bring life and beauty from the creation were marred with thorns: the emblem of pain and ugliness. But thorns were also a reminder of the acacia thornbush of the desert, which God once inhabited personally (Ex.3:1 – 5; Acts 7:30), a sign that God could dwell among – and even within – his fallen creation, without annihilating it. By appearing as fire, God indicated His ability to purify fallen creation, because fire once guarded the way back to the garden (Gen.3:24). When Jesus wore a crown of thorns, it was not only physically painful. He was taking onto himself another symbol of human exile and fallenness, but also a symbol of God's commitment to dwell among it and within it, to purify it.

Third, Jesus was mocked by his enemies. For the Jews in the biblical period up until this point, to be handed over to the Gentiles in defeat was humiliation and shame. The long Jewish history of making sinful alliances with Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon resulted in God giving them over to these powers and allowing these powers to invade Israel and shame the Jews. Jesus was handed over to the Gentile enemies to share in Israel's exile and humanity's vulnerability.

Fourth, Jesus was hung on a tree. While the Roman practice of crucifixion was excruciating and humiliating on its own merits, the Jews also had an understanding of that act. In the Mosaic Law, being hung on a tree was the expression that the person in question had already cursed his own human nature. Some Israelites damaged their human nature so badly that they were stoned, declared 'cursed,' and placed on a tree (Dt.21:22 – 23). This alludes to the grotesque sin of Cain, who was a 'stubborn and rebellious son,' and sons are explicitly mentioned in Dt.21:18 – 21, which provides context for v.22 – 23. Notice that Cain was cursed without being hung on a tree – a very important point. Adam and Eve had already cursed human nature by seizing God's prerogative to define good and evil, and taking it into themselves. God responded by preventing them from eating from the tree of life – that is, from immortalizing the disorder and evil within themselves (Gen.3:22 – 24), via our bodies dying and dissolving back into the earth. Cain demonstrated that human nature was corrupted because the influence of jealousy was already within him; he needed no external voice of jealousy like his parents had. And because of Cain's own choices, he further cursed his own human nature and alienated himself from the land (Gen.4:11). Thus, in Israel's law, the one whose body was hung on a tree reminded the community of Cain's self-alienation from the land. Placing their body on a tree did not curse them. They cursed themselves already *by their own prior choices*. Thus, when Paul read Dt.21:22 – 23 in connection with Jesus hung on the cross (Gal.3:13), he recognized Jesus as *identifying* what was already cursed about our existence: our human nature. The cross did not impose an additional curse on Jesus. Rather, Jesus took onto himself what was already cursed. And, as in his baptism where he identified human nature as needing cleansing, Jesus on the tree identified human nature as cursed. The two events are symmetrical. Jesus hung in the place where 'great sinners' were to be hung. In that sense, he took our place: He shared it. He did not deflect some 'divine retributive justice' away from us. Instead, he killed the thing that was killing us: the corruption of sin within our humanity.

Fifth, Jesus filled to the full the role of David in exile, even more intensely than David himself endured. The Roman soldiers mocked Jesus as 'King of the Jews' (Mt.27:27 – 29). They used a Roman intimidation technique: a public sign over Jesus' crucified body declaring that this is what will happen to anyone else who claimed to be 'King of the Jews' and defied the Roman Emperor (Mt.27:37). In between, we see all the elements of an execution squad which intended to humiliate Jesus as much as possible. The 'whole Roman cohort' (Mt.27:27) was the death squad. They stripped Jesus and mocked his claim to royalty by putting a scarlet robe on him (Mt.27:28), bending thorny branches into a crown and forcing it down upon his head (Mt.27:29), and giving him a thin stick as a mock scepter. They knelt down before him (Mt.27:29), probably not knowing what was more uproariously funny – either that this defeated man claimed to be a 'king,' or that the Jewish people were so pathetic that some actually put their hope in this weakling. Then they grabbed the thin stick and whacked him on the head with it, surely driving the thorns deeper. They forced another Jew, Simon of Cyrene, to carry Jesus' cross for a short distance, once again mocking Rome's power over Israel and mocking Jesus' apparent powerlessness to prevent them from treating other Jews – his supposed subjects – this way. They crucified Jesus on that Roman cross, the torture device designed to stretch out a person's death and make it as publicly humiliating as possible. The only act which had an iota of kindness was the offer of a narcotic drink that would have dulled his senses. Tellingly, Jesus refused that. He was going to be fully present.

Sixth, Jesus died. To be precise, he entered the realm of the dead. Human beings started to die because God exiled Adam and Eve from the garden. God did so because He did not want humans to eat from the tree of life in a corrupted state, and then make our sinfulness immortal. Death was a way to free human beings from the corruption of sin. So, while death may be the last enemy, it is a friend before it is an enemy. While the insights of 1 Peter 3:18 – 20 and 4:6, along with Ephesians 4:9, are not narrated in Matthew's Gospel, his narration stresses Jesus' solidarity with us in our death. Death, in Old Testament thought, is simply the last stage of the exile. Since Jesus shared in our exile, he also shared in our death.

Jesus recapitulated every way we rejected God before. We rejected God in the garden of Eden and sent ourselves into exile. Then, throughout the long history of Israel, the Jewish people rejected God over and over; they forsook God's protection and sent themselves into exile. Now when God came in the flesh, in the person of His Son, Jesus, into the very place of Israel's exile among the nations, then there was nowhere for us – Jew and Gentile – to run any more. There was no other place to escape his claim of authority over us and his call to partnership with him. So we threw God into the exile which we could manufacture. We put all the elements of exile onto Him. We made a parody of a kingly coronation and crowned him, in exile.

But this time, our rejection of God served His love for us. We exiled ourselves to get away from God. Jesus pursued us there. He entered our world for us, despite knowing that we will try to push Him out. But Jesus turns all the elements around him into an imaginative coronation scene. All the pieces are there: a military cohort acknowledging him, a crown on his head, a scepter in his hand, a royal robe on his shoulders, a subject who helps him hold his banner, a seat from which he can sit, enthroned, and see his subjects, and a sign publicly declaring his identity.

Jesus fully identified with, and entered, all the forlorn experiences of people from Adam and Eve onward, especially his people Israel. Even though he was innocent, Jesus took to himself all the experiences and symbols of his people's exile. Jesus drew them onto himself, including death, in order to emerge on the other side of all that as God's new humanity. As God, Jesus recapitulated the rejection human beings have always dealt God, rejecting Him at His most vulnerable moments, and slapping Him across His face – a face now incarnate and not anthropomorphic. God met us in our exile, and to repay Him, we further exiled Him.

Yet as a human being, Jesus recapitulated the faithful obedience unto the Father by the Spirit which we should have rendered. He lived the life we couldn't live and died the death we couldn't die – a virtuous death which served as a capstone over his long battle against the corruption of sin. He also died because his incarnation into human being and human experience was not yet complete; he needed to go into the realm of death because humans were waiting there for him, which is perhaps the most straightforward implication of Matthew's intriguing detail that some dead people were resuscitated. Their souls returned to

their bodies, because Jesus' human soul, after leaving his dead body, went to the place of those souls, and offered them life. Since only a limited number of people were resuscitated, we presume, it makes some sense that those who were had been only very recently dead. This was a sign that Jesus' ministry continued after his death. He recapitulated the full journey of human beings, even into the realm of the souls of the dead.

Conclusion

As I stated earlier, I believe John Stott should have treated Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1 as an intertextual reference. Jesus was invoking king David's journey of exile before enthronement for the sake of those around him who thought that the messiah should not face death at Gentile hands. Jesus' point is that if David suffered at the hands of the Gentiles (Ps.22), how much more would the heir of David? Unfortunately Stott does not even consider this.

As the wilderness temptation and the Garden of Gethsemane stories indicate, at the very moment when Jesus needed the strength and love of the Father the most – at his crucifixion and death – the Father was there with him and for him through the bond of the Spirit. The Father spoke a word of blessing and identity, gave the Spirit without measure, strengthened Jesus supernaturally, and gave Jesus the conviction to be victorious over sinfulness all the way to the end. The wrath of God did not pass from the Father upon the Son. It was not an inner-Trinitarian rupture of their relationship.

And so, perhaps the most troubling aspect of penal substitutionary atonement theory, the impression that the Father is a legalistic perfectionist who uses relational distancing and/or punitive action when he feels slighted for any reason whatsoever, is entirely avoided. In the union of the Father-Son relationship, and in the united action of the Trinity in the medical substitutionary atonement accomplished through the active, not passive, obedience of Jesus, we have a Father who is even within his Son, for something greater than the temple is here, to support and empower his Son to accomplish the greatest internal battle of the Son's life, in the face of the greatest external suffering he had endured. And the Father sends the Son and the Spirit because the united Godhead wants we, in our sin, have committed acts of self-vandalism, and so damaged that which God loves the most: us. That damage needs to be undone, cut and burned away, with ruthless surgical precision in the human nature of every single person, so that every human being could become the bearer of God's image and likeness which God always intended.

The Posture of the Father Towards Jesus and Towards Us

As a child, I was afraid that I would make my favorite sports team lose by watching them play on TV. I had a fear: Was the cosmos against me, even in trivial ways like that?

Similarly, at times, we feel like the universe is against us somehow. When we don't get a parking space. When a loved one gets cancer.

And when we stop to recognize that the universe will one day become cold, dark, and dead, we wonder. Maybe life is a short, brief tease in a cosmos that promises to turn against us and swallow us up in death.

Whether it's rational or not, it's easy to project these nagging thoughts onto God the Father.

What is the demeanor and posture of God the Father towards us? And what is the Father's demeanor and posture towards Jesus at his hour of deepest need? The two questions are inseparably related. In the midst of all our anxieties, suspicions, and insecurities, we must address this – one of the most significant of all emotional and theological questions.

How Penal Substitution Answers

John Stott, in his treatment of Jesus' cry from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,' *affirms* that God does abandon and forsake us indeed, through the experience of Jesus himself. Stott's

response to this insecurity about God the Father is to take comfort in the suggestion that Jesus experienced that, too. It is unclear to me why anyone would be comforted by that idea.

In what is called the penal substitutionary atonement theory, the Father turning against and/or away from the Son is a staple belief. We deserve a penalty for the guilt of our sin, however big or small, because God is an infinite being against whom any offenses deserves an infinite penalty. But Jesus substitutes himself in for us to take that penalty. I believe this theory of penal substitutionary atonement misinterprets the demeanor of God the Father. Stott, a representative of that theory, says:

‘In the darkness, however, he was absolutely alone, being now also God-forsaken... an actual and dreadful separation took place between the Father and the Son; it was due to our sins and their just reward; and Jesus expressed this horror of great darkness, this God-forsakenness, by quoting the only verse of Scripture which accurately described it, and which he had perfectly fulfilled, namely, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’³¹

However, Stott simultaneously asserts that the Father did not forsake the Son. This is curious:

‘The... God-forsakenness of Jesus on the cross must be balanced with such an equally biblical assertion as ‘God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.’ C.E.B. Cranfield is right to emphasize both the truth that Jesus experienced ‘not merely a felt, but a real, abandonment by his Father’ and ‘the paradox that, while this God-forsakenness was utterly real, the unity of the Blessed Trinity was even then unbroken.’³²

This results in a very mixed, even schizophrenic, presentation of God the Father. I dare say, this understanding does little to nothing in addressing our nagging doubts about the character, demeanor, and disposition of God the Father.

The Father Was Always Well-Pleased by the Son, and With the Son

A core staple of historic, orthodox reflection on the Trinity – for example, from the pen of Athanasius of Alexandria, and the church leaders who convened at the Council of Nicaea in 325 – is that the Father and Son have enjoyed an unbroken relationship of mutual indwelling and love. This core belief flows out of statements Jesus made about the Father loving him and indwelling him, primarily from John’s Gospel (Jn. 14:6 – 11; 15:9 – 10; 16:32; 17:21 – 26). The Nicene Creed of 325, taking note of those statements in the battle with Arianism(s), declares that the Son is ‘same in essence’ (*homoousion*) and ‘from the essence’ (*ek tis ousia*) of the Father, which has profound implications for the unity of Father and Son.

However, I have not yet explained the Father-Son relation by analyzing one of the Synoptic Gospels *per se*, especially Matthew or Mark, wherein we find the cry of Jesus, ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?’ In the past few posts, I have argued point by point against the penal substitutionary interpretation of Jesus’ cry from the cross, which requires that Jesus bore the infinite retributive justice of God. To the contrary, that is not at all what a closer examination of the text upholds. David, the original human author of Psalm 22, was not expressing being *vertically* forsaken by God, as if God had personally turned against or away from him. Instead, he was registering a complaint with God about feeling *horizontally* forsaken to his enemies. God was still assuring David even as he composed Psalm 22 that He was listening, protecting, caring, and responding in covenantal lovingkindness. In fact, David, as the rightful king anointed by the Holy Spirit, and as a prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit who composed Psalm 22, could not have been God-forsaken in a vertical sense because that would jeopardize the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God was assuring David through the Spirit-anointing that He had not abandoned David, or in any way departed from Him.

I also examined the way Jesus retold David’s story from David’s pre-enthronement period. Both by word and by deed, by direct verbal quotation and by allusion through re-enactment, Jesus made the case for himself being the true heir of David: If David was initially rejected and suffered before being enthroned,

³¹ John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.81

³² *Ibid* p.81 – 82

why not the Son of David who is the greater David? I paid special attention to how Jesus deployed Psalm 22 from the cross. He did not seem to be referring to his own emotional state, given the honor-shame culture which he inhabited. Rather, he seemed to quote it against his detractors, who had already quoted Psalm 22 whether they intended to or not. Their mockery took the exact words and erroneous judgment of those who mocked the early David. Jesus' utterance of Psalm 22:1, therefore, served as part of Jesus' argument that he was indeed the messianic heir of David whose story had to resemble David's story, because he was the greater David.

I will now look at the three times in Matthew's Gospel when the Father says that he is 'well-pleased' with the Son. The achievements and commitments Jesus made during those three episodes will inform the implicit demeanor of the Father towards him during the crucifixion experience. Not only that, but the relationship between the Father and Jesus disclosed beforehand will require a conclusion: the Father could not have turned against or away from Jesus in any sense while he hung on the cross.

The Father Pleased by Jesus' Public Commitment to Cleanse Human Nature: Matthew 3:13 – 4:11

'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.' (Matthew 3:17)

The first time God the Father speaks, he says these words. Why? We can identify two main reasons. First, the Father summarized Jesus' life up to that point. The Father's word of blessing and love indicates that Jesus had never sinned before. Jesus was absolutely blameless.

Second, the Father's blessing and love empowered Jesus henceforth for the public role on which he was embarking. Jesus was publicly declaring his claim on the throne of his father David. The Father indicates that he fully approved of Jesus' shifting from quiet private citizen, as it were, to messianic king. In this sense, the Father's word must be heard as a quotation of the coronation psalm of the kings of Judah: Psalm 2.

But the latter aspect, Jesus' public role as king, was built on the foundation of the former, Jesus' basic role as a human being. Jesus had to continue being victorious over the corruption of sin. As a human being dependent on the Spirit, Jesus was going to conquer the temptation of sin and cleanse his human nature from the corruption that lay deep within it. Thus, Jesus came to be baptized, which involved the confession of sin and need for cleansing. John the Baptist was surprised, since he assumed the messiah would not need to do such a thing. But Jesus apparently confessed the sinfulness of his humanity. He did not confess personal guilt for committing a sinful act in deed, word, thought, or emotion – for in that regard, he was sinless. In effect, he 'outed' every human being. The problem of sinfulness goes more deeply than anyone cares to admit. By confessing the sinfulness of his own humanity, Jesus confessed the sinfulness of each one of us.

Jesus also publicly committed to taking that sinfulness all the way to its death, despite the added pressures and stresses of identifying himself as the promised heir of David, and gathering a group of followers in a tense, hostile environment. The rite of baptism represented a commitment to die and be raised again. Therefore, Jesus said he had another baptism to undergo: actual death and resurrection, indicated directly by Luke (Lk.12:50), and by Matthew by other means. Jesus demonstrated his commitment to radically excise that sinfulness by never giving into the temptations in the wilderness (Mt.4:1 – 11). In light of this public commitment, the Father declared that Jesus was his beloved Son.

I believe Jesus can be thought of as etching and inscribing the identity of 'beloved child of God' into his humanity. The Hebrew Scriptures, notably the Proverbs and Jeremiah, regarded the human heart as a tablet on which the human worshiper of God needed to write the commands of God (Prov.1:23; 2:10; 3:3; 6:21; 7:3). Unfortunately, the script of sinfulness was already there in some way (Jer.17:1 – 10), surely in various degrees across people, and needed to be undone. God therefore needed to rewrite His law upon the tablets of human hearts in the new covenant (Jer.31:31 – 34). Matthew called attention to Jeremiah's prophecy and hope at the start of Jesus' human life, quoting Jeremiah's mournful commentary on Israel's exile (Jer.31:15) when Israel was vulnerable to the murderous Herod as Herod sought to kill the infant Jesus (Mt.2:17 – 18). But if Jeremiah's hope was for a new covenant, which inscribed divine law on

human hearts in a new and deeper way than Sinai could, we are surely invited to see Jesus as enacting that new covenant, on a mountain like Sinai, and with divine law addressing the human heart at last. In the wilderness temptation, the devil wanted to trick Jesus into redefining the meaning of 'Son of God' into something else. Jesus responded by saying, first, that he must live on every word that comes from the mouth of God. The last word Jesus had heard was, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.' No doubt that blessing of love from the Father continued to resonate quietly in his human heart and mind. He was taking what he had heard from his Father, and engraving the Father's blessing of love into his human nature, which had a strange resistance and rebellion within it.

The Father Pleased by Jesus' Revealing Him: Matthew 11:25 – 12:21

'Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased'
(Matthew 12:18)

Jesus gathered people who had similarly been baptized by John the Baptist, which signified a personal Exodus-Red Sea experience. He drew them together and brought them to a mountain, where he gave his followers the new law of the heart (Mt.5:1 – 7:29), echoing God at Mount Sinai but also fulfilling Jeremiah's long hoped-for vision of divine writing onto the tablets of human hearts (Jer.31:31 – 34). Jesus uttered ten declarations that delivered people from disease, death, and the demonic (Mt.8:1 – 9:35), echoing the ten words on Egypt which freed Israel from bondage, and also the ten commandments, which were meant to help Israel come free from their sinfulness, though their flesh was too weak for this to be effectual (Rom.8:3). Then Jesus sent out his disciples to claim people, in a new type of conquest and inheritance, looking for 'people of peace' (Mt.9:36 – 11:1), much like God sent the Israelites out to claim the land as their inheritance and found Rahab and her household. By doing all this, Jesus was recapitulating the role of God in Israel's history. He was making a claim to be divine.

But Jesus appeared – miracles and manner of speech aside – to be a mere man. How could this mere man claim to be divine? To further refine his assertion, Jesus then made this astounding claim to uniquely know and reveal the Father:

²⁵ 'I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.' (Matthew 11:25 – 27)

This statement has been called 'the bolt from the Johannine sky' for its resemblance to the Father-Son statements contained in John's Gospel. Jesus' next claim, to offer true 'sabbath rest' to those who come to him (Mt.11:28 – 30), only took his claim one step further. Who else could grant 'rest' but God who ordained it first in creation?

When challenged about these claims, Jesus then said, 'Something greater than the temple is here' (Mt.12:6). In effect, Jesus drew on the Jewish historic institution of the temple to denote how God located His tangible presence in one and only one location. Now, Jesus was claiming to *be* that location, in a human mode of being. Furthermore, the temple fits as a template for Jesus as housing and revealing the divine. This would retrospectively buttress Jesus' implicit claim to be divine, given his past activities which drew from the Mosaic era of Israel's history. From a roughly chronological perspective of Israel's history, which Jesus was retelling (recapitulating), he segues into the Davidic era, which was dominated by the physical temple building in Jerusalem.

Before moving on to Jesus' retelling of Israel's Davidic era, however, mention must be made of the quotation from the prophet Isaiah. Matthew comments on Jesus' activity and claims by quoting Isaiah 42:1 – 4. This messianic 'Servant Song' speaks of the Isaianic 'Servant' who is the 'chosen one' who stands in for the 'chosen people,' because Israel had failed in their vocation to be a light to the nations. The scope of the mission and kingdom of the messiah is, as Isaiah reminds us, 'the Gentiles,' and not just Israel. And in connection with this vision, God says that the 'Servant' is 'My beloved.' While questions about the

meaning of Isaiah 53 need to be addressed as well, which I have done elsewhere, there is no indication here that God pours out divine retributive justice on the Servant instead of Israel, or makes the Servant face a form of divine abandonment. There is only a reminder that the Father said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'

The Father Pleased by Jesus Establishing His Kingdom: Matthew 17:1 – 13

'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him!' (Matthew 17:5)

In the fourth section of Matthew's Gospel (Mt.14:1 – 19:1), Jesus reinforced his identity as both 'king' and 'temple,' retelling the pre-enthronement period of David's life. Jesus supplied bread abundantly, twice: once to Jews (Mt.14:13 – 21) and once to Gentiles (Mt.15:29 – 39). These were Davidic actions with temple symbolism. Sandwiched between the two feedings, Jesus critiqued the existing physical temple building, while referencing the existing problem of human evil in the heart which needed to be resolved if God were going to dwell in human beings, implying that he would solve that problem (Mt.15:1 – 20). He demonstrated his concern for a Canaanite woman and welcomed her into the family of God (Mt.15:21 – 28), since a universal human problem necessitated a universal invitation to join Jesus' movement and God's family now organized around Jesus. Jesus then drew out from the disciples, notably Simon Peter, a confession of his messianic title (Mt.16:1 – 28). Jesus then goes to be transfigured (Mt.17:1 – 13).

As the temple was on Mount Zion, Jesus was similarly on Mount Tabor. As God's presence descended on the temple as a cloud of glory, Jesus is suffused and surrounded by a cloud of glory. As God appeared in light and glory, Jesus appeared to his disciples radiant of face and garment. Whatever the exact meaning of the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mountain with Jesus, it is striking that both men encountered God before on a mountain. Moses met God on Mount Horeb and beheld some manifestation of God which made his own face shine (Ex.34:1 – 35). And Elijah met God on Mount Horeb with awe-inspiring natural phenomena and then a soft whisper (1 Ki.19:8 – 12). Jesus was making a claim to be the very presence of God who led Israel before. To support this claim comes not only through the voices of the prophets of old, represented by Moses and Elijah, but the voice of God the Father.

The Father's voice comes once more to authenticate Jesus. By this point in time, although his mission is not yet complete, Jesus has demonstrated that he can be victorious over temptation, inwardly, and therefore establish the messianic kingdom, outwardly. Once again the relationship between the dual aspects of his mission is highlighted.

The story of the demon-possessed boy (Mt.17:14 – 23) seems to serve a few functions related to Jesus' humanity and mission. First, the story suggests that the nine disciples (those other than Peter, James, and John) who were not with Jesus on the mountain encountered a limitation to their spiritual power. This limitation is connected to not knowing about or understanding Jesus' transfiguration, and, by extension, Jesus' coming death and resurrection. God will connect more spiritual power over the demonic with Jesus' resurrection and enthronement.

Second, Jesus says that the divine presence and power demonstrated on 'the mountain' of transfiguration can be 'move[d] from here to there' (Mt.17:20). This cryptic remark can be connected to Jesus' temple-like actions, as well as his later remark just outside of Jerusalem when he effectively says that the disciples will 'move' the presence of God from the Jerusalem temple to the realm of the Gentiles, where they will go in Christian mission (Mt.21:21 – 22; the 'sea' to which Jesus refers is a Danielic term for the realm of the Gentiles – the place from which the beastly empires arise). The disciples will take the presence of Jesus – transfigured and resurrected – with them in mission to the world.

Third, Jesus saw a parallel between the boy and himself. The demons treated the boy violently. And Jesus foresaw his treatment at 'the hands of men' violently, to be killed and raised again (Mt.17:22 – 23). This episode matters for our understanding of the atonement. Jesus did not indicate, or even remotely suggest, that *God the Father* would treat him with violence in any form. The ill-treatment Jesus would endure comes from *men*.

Did It Please the Father to Punish the Son? Jesus' Struggle in Gethsemane: Matthew 26:36 – 46

'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will.'
(Matthew 26:39)

The Father's voice is curiously absent from the story of Jesus during his temptation in Gethsemane, trial, and crucifixion. What are we meant to infer from this?

The Cup of God's Wrath

Jesus referred to the 'cup' of the cross as physical death. We know this because Jesus said the disciples would drink from the same 'cup' from which he was going to drink:

²² But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to him, 'We are able.'²³ He said to them, 'My cup you shall drink...' (Matthew 20:22 – 23)

In other words, the disciples will face their own deaths by martyrdom in their own ways. Since there is no other distinct 'cup' introduced between this conversation and Gethsemane and the cross, we are left to conclude that Jesus was simply referring to death by martyrdom. The 'cup' is physical death.

Much more has been made of this 'cup' of Gethsemane by penal substitution advocates. John Stott, for instance, believes there must have been quite a different and unique 'cup' for Jesus that his disciples did not drink, despite Jesus saying quite the contrary. Stott points out that neither Socrates nor Christian martyrs nor people dying for other causes dreaded death as much as Jesus.³³ What then explains the terrible agony that Jesus felt in Gethsemane? Was he uniquely cowardly? Surely not. How then can we explain the 'cup' referred to at Gethsemane simply as 'death'? Why did Jesus dread death so much?

Stott believes that there was a measure of divine wrath that invisibly passed onto Jesus, which he 'drank.' He concatenates references to a 'cup' of God's wrath from the Old Testament.³⁴ God handed the disobedient and rebellious a 'cup' of ruin, desolation, etc. until they drink it dry (Ps.75:8; Isa.51:17 – 22; Jer.25:15 – 29; 49:12; Ezk.23:32 – 34; Hab.2:16; Rev.14:10; 16:1ff and 18:6). The 'cup' to be drunk always refers to a historical experience that had a terminus; hence the metaphorical use of the idea of drinking a cup dry.

But most of these references are related only semantically; they simply share a common metaphor to describe varied historical experiences.

Moreover, God had already 'poured out' His wrath in the Old Testament. So what divine wrath was leftover for Jesus to drink? Prior to Jesus, God had to protect Israel for Jesus' sake, and therefore had to judge the Gentile nations roundabout Israel for the harm they dealt Israel. This was true of the generation of Noah, which menaced the family of Noah, the last family of faith, with violence (Gen.6:5 – 6); if faith was extinguished from the earth, there would be no family to raise Jesus, so God had to protect Noah and family. The same could be said for Sodom and Gomorrah, rescued once by Abraham (Gen.14) yet deeply hostile to Lot and family, and any new settlers to the land (Gen.19).

Furthermore, God had already 'poured out' His wrath upon Israel for their rebellion against Him. He caused a few supernatural events, but otherwise, God simply declared that the Gentile enemies who perceived concentrated wealth in Jerusalem – itself an act of disobedience against God (Dt.17:16 – 17) – and concentrated power there were drawn in by Israel's leaders' own disobedience (e.g. Isa.38 – 39). The nations that menaced Israel would do them harm, and ultimately take them into exile. So, when God addressed Jerusalem, He said, poetically, that Jerusalem had already suffered *double* the punishment for all her sins (Isa.40:1). He said that the nations like Babylon, which had been involved in Jerusalem's overthrow, exceeded what God intended and would be punished (Zech.1:12 – 17) by successive empires,

³³ John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.74 – 75

³⁴ *Ibid* p.76 – 77

each being toppled by the next (Dan.7 – 12). The author of Hebrews summarizes salvation history prior to Jesus by saying that ‘every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty’ (Heb.2:2) already.

That includes human death: Death is the severe mercy that God imposed on human beings as the alternative to allowing human beings to immortalize the corruption of sin inside us, if we could eat from the tree of life (Gen.3:22 – 24). God’s loving hand was forced by Adam and Eve to close access to the garden. It was a consequence of love, and even a punishment, yes, but *intrinsic* to the sin, not *extrinsic* to it and arbitrarily added on. God said, ‘You will die,’ not, ‘I will kill you.’

What divine wrath, then, was still remaining? Does the ‘cup’ of God’s wrath refer to the future judgment of a penal hell, conceived of as a prison from which people desire to escape and be with God, yet God says ‘no’? I do not think so. For instance, the motif of fire, which characterizes hell, and is so often taken to be strictly retributive and punitive, begins *positively* in every biblical book in which it appears.

Divine Fire in Scripture

‘Fire’ is God’s attempt to refine and purify people. When God closed the garden to Adam and Eve, the first incidence of fire anywhere in Scripture occurs. Guarding the way to the tree of life was a flaming sword (Gen.3:24), probably symbolizing the word of God (Rev.1:16, etc.) which can cut /burn uncleanness away. Both the fire motif and the sword motif anticipate circumcising/cutting/burning something away from people so they could eventually return to the tree of life. Critical to this motif is the teaching of the Pentateuch about *human nature*. The early church had a very strong understanding of *human nature from a biblical perspective*.³⁵ Adam and Eve damaged and cursed human nature by taking in the power and desire to define good and evil for themselves (Gen.3: 1 – 7). The damage was further shown by the fact that their son Cain did not need an external voice to make him jealous. The voice was already internal to him; sin was crouching at his door *within him*. By murdering his brother, Cain damaged his own human nature even *further*, explicitly cursing himself so the land would not be fruitful for him (Gen.4:11). But God called for our human partnership to burn and/or cut something away our human nature – with each person, because God in His love made us with the capacity to shape our human nature with Him.

The theme of the sword-circumcision complements the theme of fire. God instituted circumcision (Gen.17) with Abraham and Sarah, as a new kind of Adam and Eve in a new garden land, after they learned to ‘cut away’ certain attitudes of male privilege and power which were culturally but not spiritually acceptable; God wanted them to have a child like Adam and Eve would have had a child, with hope and trust in Him; Abraham could not discard Eve and monopolize the promise for himself (Gen.12); Abraham could not name a non-biological heir (Gen.15); Abraham and Sarah could not use a surrogate mother (Gen.16). God used circumcision as a symbol that He and they had ‘cut away’ something unclean from their attitudes about marriage and parenting. Circumcision was institutionalized with all male children of Israel to show how the covenant ‘cut away’ something unclean from humans (Lev.12), and later was used as an outward symbol of an inward surgery where God and humans in partnership would ‘cut away’ something unclean from the human heart by the Law being written on the heart (Dt.10:16; 30:6).

God then appears as a fire in the burning thorn bush (Ex.3:2; Acts 7:30). God also appears as fire on Mount Sinai inviting Israel higher up and further in (Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5). See also Hebrews 12:18 – 29, where the writer says that we come not to the fiery Mt. Sinai, but to a new Mt. Zion after having been cleansed and perfected through Jesus, ‘for our God is a consuming fire.’ And God in Israel’s Temple was acting like a dialysis machine: ‘Give me your impurity, and I will give you back My purity.’ It was like Jewish circumcision, cutting something unclean away from the person, and cleansing the person. The laying on of hands on the animal symbolized placing the corrupted part of us and giving it to God to consume. God consumed it with fire directly, or indirectly consumed it through the priests. God then gave Israel back innocent, uncorrupted animal blood. So God used the sacrifices as a way of refining and purifying Israel.

³⁵ See my list of resources and citations from the patristic period here:
<http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/resources.who.is.god.creation.htm>.

'Fire and darkness' come from Israel's refusal to come up Mount Sinai to meet with God. Moses, by contrast, went up to see and meet with God, and his face shone (Ex.34). Moses said: 'You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom...' I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; *for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain* (Dt.4:11; 5:5). Fire and darkness are literary motifs related to Israel's failure at Mount Sinai. They said, 'No' to God's invitation to come higher up and further in, and *remained on the outside of God* instead.³⁶

So is fire positive or negative for us? If we want to be cleansed by Jesus' Holy Spirit, fire is positive. The Spirit refines us like precious metal in fire. The Spirit took Jesus' humanity and empowered him to resist temptation (Mt.3:13 – 4:11). Which meant Jesus was baptized by the Holy Spirit to purify his human nature. He then said that his presence was giving forth 'light' in darkness as Isaiah prophesied (Mt.4:16). His followers would become the new temple-presence of God; they would be like a lamp, which of course gives off light by a burning fire within (Mt.5:14 – 16), because they would participate in Jesus' own purification of his human nature. In each of us, our spiritual eye's focus serves as a lamp, which lights us within (Mt.6:22 – 23). Very importantly, the next time the Spirit's presence is manifested on Jesus, the Spirit transfigures him (Mt.17:2, 5), and presents Jesus as the new temple-presence of God on a mountain, engulfed in the divine glory-cloud. Like at the baptism of Jesus, the Father and the Spirit acknowledge Jesus' identity publicly, and this literary symmetry is important because it establishes the 'Spirit and fire' baptism that Jesus is putting his human nature through, by which he gives forth light through his very own humanity. The parable of the ten virgins uses the motifs of the lamp, oil, fire, and light to represent our inward preparation to contribute to a kingdom celebration much bigger than ourselves (Mt.25:1 – 13). If not, fire is negative, destructive. But it depends on us. The same is true in Jesus' use of 'fire and darkness' as a conjoined motif throughout the Gospels. He was reminding people of Israel's refusal to go up Mount Sinai and be purified by God. God then appeared to them, from the outside, as 'fire and darkness.' But for Jesus' disciples, at Pentecost, the Spirit comes with tongues of fire upon them (Acts 2:1 – 13), symbolizing purification.

Revelation uses fire as symbolic of God's refining presence. Jesus is described first with fire. 'His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace' (Rev.1:14 – 15; 2:18). He says, 'I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.' (Rev.3:18). But then, fire is destroying for those who cling to impurity: 'tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb' (Rev.14:10). And of course we have the famous lake of fire passage (Rev.20:12 – 15). But the followers of Jesus are purified as 'pure gold, like clear glass' (Rev.21:18, 21). Pure gold is not like clear glass in terms of *transparency*. But pure gold is like clear glass in terms of *being purified of any impurity*. So when God is described as fire, the Bible pairs that description with the *effect* of fire: either purified people, or tormented people.

There is no biblical basis, therefore, to assume that God has an attribute that we could call 'divine retributive justice,' where any offense against God's holiness calls for infinite wrath, on the supposed grounds that God is an infinite being. Such a claim collapses all sins – trivial and monstrous – into one category, making 'stealing paper from the office' as morally punishable in an infinite torture chamber as 'masterminding the Holocaust.' And 'retributive justice' as an attribute cannot even be logically connected to the conviction that God is love (1 Jn.4:8) in His very nature. If God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity, even before the Triune God made anything, then all activities of God in relation to the creation must flow out of His love, and be expressions of His love.³⁷ Thus, God's wrath must be an expression of

³⁶ For more information on these New Testament passages on fire and darkness, as well as the Old Testament's treatment of these motifs, see my paper, *Hell as Fire and Darkness: Remembrance of Sinai as Covenant Rejection in Matthew's Gospel* found here: <http://nagasawafamily.org/matthew-theme-fire-and-darkness-as-hell.pdf>. And also an exploration of systematic theology, church history, and Scripture in *Hell as the Love of God* found here: <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-hell-as-the-love-of-god.pdf>.

³⁷ See Mako A. Nagasawa, *Hell as the Love of God* found here: <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-hell-as-the-love-of-god.pdf>. See also Steve McVey, *What is God's Wrath?* (Grace Communion International), found here: <https://www.gci.org/Y1112>

His love: like the wrath of a surgeon against the cancerous sin in our bodies, which serves the love of the surgeon for us as persons because he wants everything that harms us out of us.

The Reason for Jesus' Agony at Gethsemane

So if Jesus was not going to endure a hidden, invisible torture of divine retribution, then why did he tremble so much at the prospect of the cross? Because losing human life was so *unnatural from the standpoint of God's original design for his creation*. Maximus the Confessor (c.580 – 662 AD), the brilliant Greek Byzantine theologian and monk who lost his tongue and right hand opposing the heresy called monothelitism, was the first to formally write about this. A representative of Catholic scholars who have a renewed appreciation for the Greek East, Edward T. Oakes, S.J., summarizes Maximus' position in this way:

'In prior centuries, pagan philosophers often invidiously pointed to Christ's agony in the Garden as a sign of weakness before death, in pointed contrast to Socrates, who faced death serenely. Prior to Maximus, the accusation often stung; but with his more robust and anti-Socratic defense of the independent faculty of the will, the Confessor was able to turn the tables on the Platonists by showing how the human will by nature seeks the good of life and thus flinches from death, especially voluntary death. Yet this natural reluctance to die, in the case of Jesus, does not result in disobedience – not because his divine will overwhelmed his human will, but because the human will always sought obedience – and did obey in a constant human act.'³⁸

Possibly, Jesus' experience of death was a heightened version of ours. We who are ordinary humans experience a loss of our senses, a slow-down of our mind, and a dullness of soul the closer our bodies get to physical death. It is possible that Jesus, in his human soul by contrast, did not lose any clarity at all. It is likely that Jesus' human soul, aided by divine awareness, was acutely more aware of all that would happen to his human body.

I wish, however, to take this basic insight one step further. I am not so sure that explaining death simply as a violation of God's intended order is a sufficient reason to explain Jesus' deep *emotion*. I believe something else can be glimpsed. Why did Jesus tremble in agony at Gethsemane? Because of love. Jesus was the creator of all things (Jn.1:1 – 3; Rom.11:33 – 36; 1 Cor.8:6; Col.1:15 – 17; etc.), who loved all beings, especially human beings, and that included his own human body. Jesus in Gethsemane revealed the true extent of God's divine horror and revulsion at the death of any human being.

Bethany and Gethsemane

The 'Johannine Gethsemane' at Bethany clarifies that for us. When Jesus wept and felt distress at the tomb of Lazarus, he demonstrated an emotion denoted by a word used to describe horses snorting in anger: *enebrimēsato* / ἐνεβριμήσατο (Jn.11:33). Translating this 'he was deeply moved' (NASB), 'he groaned in the spirit' (KJV, ASV), 'he was deeply disturbed' (CEB), 'he was deeply moved in his spirit' (ESV), and 'he was greatly disturbed in spirit' (NRSV) is too mild and too vague. NLT and The Message translate this phrase better: 'a deep anger welled up within him,' with NLT adding, 'and he was deeply troubled.' CEV renders it, 'he was terribly upset.' JUB offers, 'he became enraged in the Spirit and stirred himself up.'

Although it lies beyond the scope of this essay here, I believe John wrote his Gospel to help us interpret Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Even if not, but especially if so, the nature of Jesus' agonizing struggle in Gethsemane must be brought into close dialogue with Jesus' angry and troubled emotion at Bethany. Jesus felt that emotion not for himself, but towards Lazarus, and for the sake of Lazarus and the community gathered around his tomb. He was angry with the devastating cost of death, the fact of death itself, and the corruption of sin which made death necessary, reluctantly so from God's perspective. Jesus' emotion at Bethany was the manifestation of focused indignation towards death as 'the last enemy,' as Paul says (1 Cor.15:26), and sinfulness as its deeper provocation.

³⁸ Edward T. Oakes, S.J., *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), p.165

At Bethany and at Gethsemane, as always, the Son revealed the Father perfectly (Heb.1:1 – 3; Mt.11:25 – 27; Jn.1:1 – 3, 17 – 18; 14:9 – 11; Col.2:9). This conviction means that Jesus' human emotions reflected something we might call, with caution, 'divine emotion.' John presents Jesus as recapitulating the role of God in creation. In this frame, Jesus is God incarnate – or rather, the Son-Word of God incarnate – forging a new creation and breathing life into a new humanity. This is seen in the massive literary allusion John makes through his narrative to Genesis 1. John jogs our memory of Genesis 1:1 through his own restatement, 'In the beginning' (Jn.1:1). He reminds us of the seven days of creation in Genesis 1 through a series of seven miracles,³⁹ seven 'I am' statements,⁴⁰ and seven discourses of Jesus.⁴¹ He reminds us of the garden of Eden in Genesis 2 by noting the location of Jesus' tomb in a garden (Jn.19:41 – 42) and even including the detail that Jesus was mistaken for a gardener (Jn.20:15). He reminds us that God breathed new life into Adam (Gen.2:7) by including Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit into the disciples (Jn.20:22). John portrays Jesus as recapitulating his creative role as the eternal Son. Jesus is God and the Son-Word of God. He is bringing forth a new humanity and new creation. As such, he represents the Father perfectly, *even in his human emotions.*

Yes, I acknowledge the divine passibility-impassibility debate, and assert in brief that God's nature as Triune and loving can be held to be unchanging and impassible, whereas God's 'divine emotions' (as it were) do appear to be dynamically responsive within a range appropriate to God's loving nature. The upshot of framing Jesus' emotions in this way is that Jesus' human emotion of agony and anguish are the manifestation of a divine love to wish life and not suffering and death on anyone. Jesus' emotion does not simply reflect a natural human will to live, but a divine will to bless and give life. Socrates regarded his body to be an encumbrance, and so had comparatively less love for it, not to mention awareness of it as the hemlock dulled his soul's senses. Jesus, however, did not regard his body as an encumbrance, but as *beloved*. So the agony and anguish of Jesus lies not in how painful or terrible death per se could be, but in who was willing the dying. Again, Jesus' human experience of death might have been qualitatively different from ours because of his acute awareness, but the key to understanding Gethsemane lies in how divinely and truly humanely loving Jesus was towards his own humanity as he was towards others.

Not What is Death, But Who Willed the Dying

Jesus trembled at Gethsemane because he looked ahead to the cross and agonized over the fact that he had to put something to death that he cherished and loved: his humanity, because he loved it as he loved Lazarus, Mary, Martha, and all other human beings. The eternal Son's now incarnate humanity was not a mere instrument, but a treasured ontological reality over which, and within which, he said, 'It is good' as he did in the original creation. To put his humanity to death was to surrender something precious, as precious as any child would be to a caring father or mother, as cherished as a wife would be to her devoted husband.

So if there was a conflict of divine commitments and loves (but not a conflict of divine 'attributes' per se), then we can see that conflict in Jesus at Gethsemane. But it was a conflict *between loves*, and *within divine love*. It was not a conflict between love and retributive justice (as in penal substitution). The Father loved the Son's humanity, and the Son manifested the Father's love for humanity by cherishing his own humanity, as it was, in that moment, as well as his personal union with his human nature. Jesus speaks of the Father's *love* for his humanity and himself when he says the Father was willing to put 'at his disposal more than twelve legions of angels' (Mt.26:53). The Father did not have a casual or punitive attitude towards Jesus' humanity. The human desires of Jesus, reflecting the original image-of-God nature intended from creation, trembled at the prospect of death because that agony was also ultimately rooted in the Father's love as well.

³⁹ Emptiness to joy: Water into wine at Cana (Jn.2:1 – 10). Sickness to health: Healing of the royal official's sick son (Jn.4:46 – 54). Debilitation to wholeness: Healing the invalid man (Jn.5:1 – 15). Hunger to nourishment: Multiplication of bread (Jn.6:1 – 14). Fear to peace: Walking on water (Jn.6:16 – 21). Blindness to sight: Healing of the blind man (Jn.9:1 – 41). Death to life: Resuscitation of Lazarus (Jn.11:17 – 44).

⁴⁰ I am the bread of life (Jn.6:35). I am the light of the world (Jn.8:12). I am the door (Jn.10:7). I am the good shepherd (Jn.10:11). I am the resurrection and the life (Jn.11:25). I am the way, the truth, and the life (Jn.14:6). I am the true vine (Jn.15:1).

⁴¹ The 'new birth' discourse with Nicodemus (Jn.3:1 – 21). The 'living water' discourse with Samaritan woman (Jn.4:1 – 42). The Father-Son discourse (Jn.5:16 – 45). The 'bread of life' discourse (Jn.6:22 – 71). The 'descent from Abraham' debate with the Pharisees (Jn.8:12 – 59). The 'good shepherd' discourse (Jn.10:1 – 38). The 'Upper Room' discourse (Jn.13:1 – 17:26).

Jesus' emotion even suggests that we can retrospectively 'read back' divine emotion of this sort onto God from earlier parts of the biblical story. From the moment God had to exile Adam and Eve from the garden to prevent them from immortalizing human evil (Gen.3:22 – 24), God was emotionally affected in a way that corresponds to Jesus' human emotion and how he manifested it. To God, human death was preferable to immortalized sin, but that does not mean God ever took a detached, instrumentalist view of the human nature which was damaged and the human persons affected. Moreover, God had to protect Israel from attack and extermination, to provide a community in which Jesus could be born and interpreted, and therefore had to take some human life by gathering human souls in sheol/hades until Jesus could present himself to them (1 Pet.3:18 – 20; 4:6; Eph.4:9). But that does not mean God took an emotionally detached view of human life and experience of death. We should especially not attribute to God the desire to simply inflict pain as if He had a strictly retributive impulse in response to our wrongdoing and self-harm.

In Gethsemane, the Father ultimately willed the Son – or rather, *the Father and Son shared one divine will* – to manifest divine love for humanity – as in, everyone else's humanity – by Jesus actively pressing onwards to make his own humanity what it ought to have been: a gift of new humanity to everyone else. Ultimately, the story of Gethsemane shows Jesus' human struggle to align his human will with the fullness of the divine priorities.

And, Gethsemane indicates that the Father was empowering Jesus to carry through with dying and rising. Luke's account includes the touching detail: 'an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him' (Lk.22:43). Jesus agreed with the mission his Father gave him. He had to utterly defeat the corruption of sin that had lodged itself in his flesh. Only through death could he cut and burn it away, and perfect his human nature anew in resurrection power. In this radical mission to craft a new humanity for all humanity, 'the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,' in the disciples as in Jesus (Mt.26:41). Only then could Jesus share his Spirit of his new humanity with us. The conflict we see in Jesus therefore flowed from a collision of divine love from various directions – between his humanity *at that moment* and his humanity *as it ought to be*, and between *his humanity* at that moment and *others' humanity* as it ought to be. This conflict *between* loves is an internal struggle worthy of the Triune God, a struggle which honors the incarnate Son and the Father who loves him, and us, deeply.

Would the Father Be Anything But Pleased by Jesus' Conquest of Sin, and Lordship Over His Humanity?: Matthew 27:11 – 54

'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.'
(Matthew 27:21)

'Truly this was the Son of God!'
(Matthew 27:55)

From the vantage point of the three mentions of the Father being 'well-pleased' with the Son, woven into the actual storyline of Matthew's narrative, including the Gethsemane scene, we are in a better place to discern the presence and disposition of the Father during the crucifixion of Jesus.

Choosing Sons and Fathers

The immediate question posed by the narrative of Matthew was which 'son' will be chosen, and therefore which 'father' as well. Matthew portrays a deep irony. Jesus was rejected publicly and mocked for claiming to be the true 'Son of the Father.' Instead of him, the Jewish crowd chose Barabbas, a nickname which means 'son of the father.' The irony could not have been lost upon Matthew's Jewish-background audience. The Jewish people present chose the wrong 'son' *and therefore* the wrong 'father.' The judgment they called down upon themselves, and rushed headlong into, was the selection of a military pretender to the messianic role. Barabbas was no mere thief, since Rome crucified failed revolutionaries and seditious zealots, not mere thieves. He was 'a notorious prisoner' (Mt.27:16), a military zealot, a failed revolutionary just like the others of that time period. Barabbas represented the road that many Jews would take as they would be led by their own wrongful interpretations of the Scriptures to attempt a war against the Roman Empire. In 70 AD, their attempt to liberate Jerusalem would fail. In 135 AD, the last holdout at Masada would fall to the Romans.

This particular wing of the Jewish community present at the crucifixion, and whoever else they represented, chose a different ‘father’ than the Father of Jesus. By opting to defend city and temple – which were destined to pass away based on biblical reasons they suppressed – by violent means, they removed themselves, at least for that time, from being able to name Abraham their father, too. By aligning against the Romans over the occupation of Jerusalem, they chose to neglect the original creational vision of God from Genesis 1, and God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 to make of him a father of many nations. Some, in their militancy, may have reduced their faith community boundaries down to biological descent from Abraham, which would have been perverse because biblical Israel was always a multi-ethnic faith open to Gentile converts. In any case, Abraham, as ‘father’ of the faithful, was declared righteous by God (Gen.15) before he was circumcised (Gen.17), which indicated the possibility, at least, that the messianic family would be both Gentile and Jewish. And Moses used circumcision – itself a ‘new creation/new humanity’ motif in the journey of Abraham – as a motif of an even deeper, surgical healing, spiritually required by all humanity, provided by God (Dt.30:6) to mark the end of the exile. The Jews were fond of claiming Abraham as their father (e.g. Jn.8:39). But at this moment, were they Abraham’s children? The question of which ‘son’ and which ‘father’ were being offered could not have been more profound.

Is Barabbas an Example of Penal Substitution?

Many have speculated on whether there is a penal substitutionary symbolism involved with the choice of Barabbas and Jesus, the guilty and the innocent.⁴² Poetic as that may be, up to a point, I do not think so.⁴³

Jesus and Barabbas were both rebels from the perspective of the Roman Empire, and both were unapologetically guilty of that particular claim. So although Jesus was innocent from a moral perspective, he was not from a political one. When the Jewish crowd selected Barabbas, they showed that Jewish revolutionary fervor was agitated to such a degree that they would later accept a popular military leader without firm Davidic credentials. This would be additionally disastrous for the wider nation within one generation, and then another. To ignore this basic observation about the Jewish crowd’s selection of Barabbas is to also ignore Jesus’ many warnings to his contemporaries about the stark choice before them.

⁴² Perhaps the most interesting of the theories come from N.T. Wright, who suggests that if there is a penalty that Jesus substituted himself in for, it would be the penalty he suffered at the hands of the Romans for claiming to be the ‘king of the Jews.’ From this bedrock of historical fact, Wright suggests that some form of ‘penal substitution’ can be re-conceptualized and re-historicized. For, it would seem that Jesus took the penalty of death for his followers, whom he instructed specifically not to participate in the Jewish attempt to liberate Jerusalem from Rome (e.g. Mt.24:1 – 31). Christians, therefore, escaped the bloodbath of 70 AD because Jesus ‘substituted’ himself in for them, as their king. Remarkably, Trevin Wax, *Don’t Tell Me N.T. Wright Denies “Penal Substitution”*, (The Gospel Coalition, April 24, 2007), a leading contributor to The Gospel Coalition, an organization dedicated to equation of ‘penal substitutionary atonement’ with ‘the gospel,’ praised Wright in a 2007 article. Wax offers that Wright should be credited with maintaining penal substitutionary atonement. Hence the title of his own article, which is found here: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/dont-tell-me-nt-wright-denies-penal-substitution/>.

⁴³ I believe Wright, for his part, was mistaken that ‘penal substitution’ can be re-centered around the events of 70 AD. I do not see how the historical facts of the Jewish-Roman War polarity can somehow be projected into the character of God by some disciplined philosophizing or allegorizing. Nor can Pontius Pilate represent God. Nor can Jesus be the substitute for the everyday Israelite. Jesus took the Roman punishment of crucifixion precisely because he wore the mantle of ‘king of the Jews.’ The ordinary Jew did not and could not claim to be that king. Referring to the footnote above: Trevin Wax does not seem to grasp the significance of how Wright shifts the target of God’s wrath from Jesus’ personhood to the corruption of sin within Jesus’ human nature, which makes Jesus’ self-substitution fundamentally not penal. Wax is mistaken, furthermore, because Wright had been too diplomatically vague until he took the subject of atonement head on in his 2016 book *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’ Crucifixion*. Also, Wax does not pay close enough attention to how Wright describes the Sinai covenant. Wright perceives the Sinai covenant as founded on God’s restorative justice, and expressing it, and explicitly denies that it portrays or enacts God’s supposedly retributive justice, which is a foundational point for penal substitution. N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p.64 says, ‘If you want to understand God’s justice in an unjust world, says the prophet Isaiah, this is where you must look. God’s justice is not simply a blind dispersing of rewards for the virtuous and punishments for the wicked, though plenty of those are to be found on the way. God’s justice is a saving, healing, restorative justice, because the God to whom justice belongs is the Creator God who has yet to complete his original plan for creation and whose justice is designed not simply to restore balance to a world out of kilter but to bring glorious completion and fruition the creation, teeming with life and possibility, that he made in the first place. And he remains implacably determined to complete this project through his image-bearing human creatures and, more specifically, through the family of Abraham.’ See also p.73. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’ Crucifixion* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2016), p.275 is more specific: ‘According to some, God gave the law in order to terrify people with the prospect of judgment, so that they would run to the gospel for relief. That appears to make some sense, provided you approach the whole thing from the works-contract point of view. But this is not, however, the sense Paul had in mind.’

Therefore, the substitutionary element was not actually open to all. Jesus was crucified by the Romans because he claimed to be the 'king of the Jews.' The ordinary Jewish person did not and could not claim to be that king. The ordinary human person per se could not make that claim either.

Finally, the Old Testament critiqued Gentile empires in such a way that would in principle prevent Jesus and Matthew from casting Pontius Pilate or the Roman Empire in the place of God for the sake of atonement symbolism. That Old Testament critique of empire began with the critique of Babel in Genesis 11, and continued all the way through to Daniel's beastly Gentile empires which distorted the good boundaries of God's original creation. The book of Revelation would continue seeing Gentile empires as deformed creatures constructed from human collective sin (Rev.17 – 18). Jesus' teachings were grounded in God's original vision of creation, not an ethics of conformity to empires and pagan culture, which he critiqued not for their idolatry but for their abuse of power (Mt.20:25 – 28). His presentation of himself to the Jewish people and the Roman officials was therefore irreducible and conflictual on the most basic level. He was the heir to the throne of David, which was the throne of the world. So he came to call for Pontius Pilate's surrender and confession of faith, not to make him a stand-in for God's justice. Notably, Jesus will receive the Roman soldier's when he breathed his final breath.

The Son Revealed the Father, in Unbroken Unity

The apparent silence of the Father at this point in Jesus' life now makes sense. The Father did not need to split the sky again, or surround Jesus with a cloud of glory. The Father had already displayed his presence with Jesus, and love for Jesus, earlier in the narrative. The 'well-pleased' declaration from the baptism stressed Jesus' victory over the corruption of sin in his humanity and the temptations that came with it (Mt.3:13 – 4:11). That declaration was an anointing for the kingship. The 'well-pleased' from the transfiguration stressed Jesus' work of revealing himself through Davidic and temple motifs, and gathering a kingdom following (Mt.17:1 – 13). That 'well-pleased' was a more explicit commissioning for death and resurrection. If Jesus brought those threads to a climax at his crucifixion, why would the Father be anything but present and 'well-pleased' with the Son?

The Roman soldier's confession serves to deepen the irony but punctuate the narrative with hope. Matthew makes a literary parallel between Simon Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16 and the Roman soldier's confession in Matthew 27:55.

Jewish: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' (Mt.16:16)

Gentile: 'Truly this was the Son of God!' (Mt.27:55)

This soldier, as a Roman, was used to confessing that Caesar was 'the son of a god.' For him to say that Jesus was 'the Son of God' meant something rather new and different. By speaking of 'God' and not 'a god,' he honored the Jewish story and the defiant Jewish monotheism that picked fights with the polytheism of Egypt, Canaan, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. That by itself was remarkable. By saying that Jesus was 'the Son' of this God meant that God the Father was well-represented by Jesus. When Christians called Joseph 'Barnabus' (Acts 4:36), 'son of encouragement,' they did so because 'encouraging' was such a strong characteristic of Joseph that he was called a 'son' of that quality. In Jesus' case, the transitive property of identification goes in the other direction. For Jesus to be called 'the Son' of God the Father means that the one true Father was characterized by Jesus. The revealed must characterize the hidden. If the Son is able to suffer with composure and integrity while innocent, then the Father must be of the same character and love.

If we say with Jesus that the Son reveals the Father, and if we say with the Roman soldier that Jesus was and is the Son of God, then we are drawn by the logic to a conclusion. The Father was revealing his character through the Son all throughout the crucifixion experience. 'Well-pleased' as he was with his Son, the Father did not turn against or away from the Son. This Roman's confession – though admittedly a small piece of evidence in the overall case – adds another element to the logical and literary argument that penal substitution is not based on the biblical text, but is a foreign intrusion into it. The Father was revealing himself in and through the Son, for the Son was choosing to reveal him (Mt.11:27).

Section A (Mt.1) is amplified by Section A' (Mt.28). The four Gentile women converts who entered the genealogy of Jesus via marriage anticipates the full Gentile inclusion brought about by Jesus' mission to the world (Mt. 1:1 – 17; 28:16 – 20). Jesus' lineage as heir of David is filled full and amplified by his realization of the full Davidic, royal 'all authority' given to him by the Father. The dilemma of Israel's exile (Mt.1:11, 17) is resolved by Jesus rising from the dead, which means that the Father has restored him from the greater exile. The angel's appearance to Joseph in a dream (Mt.1:20 – 21) is amplified by an angel's actual appearance by the empty tomb (Mt.28:6). The prophetic expectation fulfilled by Jesus' birth (Mt.1:22 – 23) is amplified by the fulfillment of Jesus' own prediction (Mt.28:7). And the birthname of Jesus, Immanuel meaning 'God with us' (Mt.1:23) is filled full by Jesus' personal presence with his disciples in mission: 'Lo, I am with you always' (Mt.28:20).

Section B (Mt.2:1 – 3:17) is amplified by Section B' (Mt.27:1 – 66). Resistance to the infant Jesus from one ruler, King Herod (Mt.2:1ff.) is amplified into resistance to the adult Jesus by both Jewish and Roman rulers (Mt.27:11 – 54). The titles 'king' or 'messiah' occurs while he is a baby (Mt.2:2, 4), while the titles 'king of the Jews,' 'king of Israel,' and 'son of God' are used for him as an adult (Mt.27:29, 36, 40, 42, 43, 54). Jesus fills to the full messianic prophecy about his birth (Mic.5:2 in Mt.2:6; likely the star refers to Num.24:17), and fills to the full messianic prophecies about his death (Isa.53:12 is triggered in Mt.26:56; Isa.53:9 seen in Mt.27:4, 19, 23, 54; Isa.53:7 seen in Mt.27:13 – 14; Isa.53:9 seen in 27:38 and 57 – 60). As a baby, Jesus begins to retell Israel's story (descent to Egypt and return in 2:13 – 23, fulfilling Hos.11:1 and Num.24:8), while the adult Jesus fills to the full Joseph's story, betrayed by 'Judah' for silver into exile (Mt.27:1 – 10), and David's pre-enthronement story of rejection and hardship (Ps.22:1 in Mt.27:46). Gentile magi-kings honor the infant Jesus as king and worship him (Mt.2:11), which is amplified by the Roman soldier who participates in Jesus' crucifixion and yet honors Jesus as 'Son of God' (Mt.27:55). Most significantly, the baptism of Jesus (Mt.3:13 – 17) – his *symbolic* dying and rising – parallels his *actual* dying and rising in his death and resurrection (Mt.27:52ff.).

The amplification of motifs from A to A' and from B to B' strongly suggests continuity, not discontinuity, specifically on the question of the Father's disposition towards the Son while Jesus was on the cross. In other words, if at Jesus' baptism, when Jesus declared his commitment to rid his human nature of the corruption of sin, God the Father said he was 'well-pleased' with his Son, what possible reason would the Father, at Jesus' climactic victory over that corruption, be other than 'well-pleased'? To claim, as John Stott and other penal substitution advocates do, that the Father was 'ill-tempered' with the Son on the cross, has absolutely no literary basis in the text.

The Father's quotation of Psalm 2:7, 'You are my Son,' from the coronation song spoken over the kings of Judah, parallels Jesus' own use of Psalm 22:1, which is Jesus' confident claim to the throne of David. His confidence was based on his consistent, lived parallel to the pre-enthronement life of David, the hunted king in the wilderness. And since this literary parallel between Psalm 2 and Psalm 22 seems compelling, even without the weight of the chiasm behind it, then I once again propose that the anointing of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' baptism and blessing of the Father must have been the constant reality in Jesus' life, without exception. If David never lost his anointing to be king, then we can say with confidence that Jesus never lost the Father's favor and his anointing to be king, either, and his anointing was in fact the Spirit of God. What does a penal substitution advocate say the Holy Spirit was doing at that moment when the Father supposedly turned against or away from the Son? I have not found anyone who approaches that question.

The Trinitarian disclosure of Father, Spirit, and Son revealed in Jesus' baptism was not momentary. Quite to the contrary, it was the hidden, spiritual stability throughout Jesus' entire life, including at the cross. It follows that Jesus never faced a closed, silent heaven. At every moment on the cross, and especially as he was finally putting to death the corruption of sin lodged in his human nature, Jesus heard the blessing of his ever-constant, ever-loving Father, as always: 'This is My Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Jesus' parallel declaration to others was, 'Like David was, I am the hunted king in exile, suffering, but on my way to the throne.'

In both episodes surrounding the quotations of Psalm 2 and 22, Jesus' identity as Son of the Father, anointed by the Spirit from the Father, was sorely tested, but vindicated. His baptism served as a foreshadowing of his death, burial, and resurrection; this affirmation and anointing of Jesus was followed

by the wilderness temptation, during which Jesus affirmed his identity as Son of the Father. The temptation in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt.26:36 – 75) serves as the other bookend corresponding to the wilderness. Jesus struggled in three categorical ways during his temptation in the wilderness; he also struggled three times during his temptation in Gethsemane. Simon Peter and the other disciples succumbed to temptation three times in Gethsemane, which served as a contrast with Jesus' faithfulness to pray and prepare himself for the trial to come. His actual death, burial, and resurrection awaited him the next day. This was the reality to which his baptism pointed. The cross, then, was the climactic moment where Jesus' identity as Son of the Father, anointed by the Spirit from the Father, was sorely tested, but vindicated. So the Father's quotation of Psalm 2 is answered by Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22. This means that the Jewish kingly title 'Son of God,' which was defined and applied to Jesus at the cross, can now be coordinated with the baptismal title 'Son of God,' which was declared at the Jordan River when Jesus disclosed the Holy Trinity.

In other words, the one who was always the 'Son of God' in one sense *became* the 'Son of God' in another sense. That is, the 'Son of God,' meaning 'the eternal Son in unending fellowship with the Father and the Spirit' in the sense of the Nicene Creed, fully accomplished the work of the 'Son of God' meaning 'king of the Jews,' a role carved out for him by the biblical narrative, defeating the deepest enemies of God, constructing a new holy temple for God in his own humanity, and delivering his people from bondage to sin by sharing his Spirit with them. Jesus Christ on the cross is the precise moment when this title, 'Son of God,' can be invested with both meanings. Christ understood as 'Son of God' in both senses at the cross anchors the overlap of dogmatic creedal theology and biblical studies. The eternal Son, now-incarnate, hung on the cross, while still *knowing and experiencing* the *unending and unbroken* fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. In this explanation, *contra* Stott, we founder on no rational inconsistencies and 'paradoxes' (contradictions) about the Father-Son-Spirit relation. If the cross and resurrection was when the eternal Son of God became the kingly Son of God, it follows that the Father, who constitutes Jesus' Sonship in both senses, was always present with him by the Spirit.

Conclusion

As I mentioned before, John Stott's argument goes awry because he assumes that Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1 has to do with Jesus' humanity in a generic sense, rather than a specifically Davidic sense. Stott remarks:

'Jesus had been meditating on Psalm 22, which describes the cruel persecution of an innocent and godly man, as he was meditating on other Psalms which he quoted from the cross...'⁴⁵

Stott should have recognized that the decisive factor is not Jesus' humanity per se but his specific, kingly, Davidic *role* within Israel and the world. That is, Jesus' humanity took its particular shape because of the role he played as the human descendent of King David on Mary's side (Lk.3:23 – 38), and as a claimant to the Davidic throne on Joseph's side (Mt.1:1 – 17). For Jesus was the Son of David who was the greater David. He was not simply human in a general, generic sense as if his social location in Israel and his familial position as the eldest son of Mary and Joseph didn't matter. Even Jesus' meditations on the Psalms from the cross were not accidental: The reason why Jesus meditated on, and evoked, the first of five portions of the book of Psalms was because he was following in the path of hardship and rejection marked out for him by David in his journey to enthronement.⁴⁶ For reasons I explained earlier about the entire structure of the Book of Psalms as the history and future of the house of David, I think it is quite likely that Jesus was especially reflecting on Psalms 22 – 31, if not the entire first portion of the *Book of Psalms*, Psalm 1 – 41.

Stott's suggestion, that Jesus' experience on the cross is a mirror to us of our ordinary human experience of feeling forsaken by God, is oriented incorrectly. Jesus' experience is a mirror to us of our human experience of feeling forsaken to *enemies*, or vulnerable to threatening forces, while still having confidence of the Father's watchful love (e.g. Ps.34:6 – 7). Understood this way, Jesus indeed encourages us by participating in our sufferings. He makes a way through them, for us. And Jesus did so while always

⁴⁵ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p.82

⁴⁶ While on the cross, Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 (Mt.27:45; Mk.15:34 – 35) and Psalm 31:5 (Lk.23:46). Perhaps Psalm 22:15 should be seen as contributing to John 19:28.

knowing the Father's love. With him, by the Spirit, we too know the unbroken and unshakable love of the Father.