

## *The Ransom Saying (Matt 20:28): A Fresh Perspective*

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Jerry D. Breen

jerry.breen@asburyseminary.edu

### **Abstract:**

The ransom saying in Matthew and Mark has intrigued scholars for centuries. Modern scholars were determined to ascertain the precise meaning of the saying to the Gospel's writers, readers, and Jesus himself. The consensus opinion that Isa 53 provides the background of the saying was challenged by two prominent NT scholars in 1959. Since then the discussion has focused on the linguistic and conceptual parallels between the ransom saying and relevant backgrounds that introduced insightful arguments for and against parallels but largely ignored the contexts of the Gospels themselves. This paper seeks to elucidate the meaning of the ransom saying by identifying the relevant contextual evidence in Matthew and applying it to the discussion. Through this study, it will be demonstrated that the ransom saying should be viewed through the lens of Dan 7 and Isa 40–55.

**Keywords:** ransom, ransom saying, Son of Man, Suffering Servant, Daniel 7; Matthew 20:28

## Introduction

The idea that Jesus's death on the cross has paid a debt on our behalf is integral to Christian belief. A survey of Christian music, both old and contemporary, demonstrates that Jesus's ransom on our behalf is a significant foundation that informs our identity. Nevertheless, there are various debates concerning how this ransom functions. The NT offers teachings and allusions about redemption, salvation, and deliverance, and Scripture even suggests that we needed Jesus to sacrifice himself for us (e.g., Heb 9:24–26; 10:1–10). What does it all mean?

In Matthew 20:28, Jesus says that he, as the Son of Man, came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. This statement is especially perplexing in that it introduces a new aspect of his mission within the Gospel narrative. The passage raises important interpretive questions, such as, what is Jesus referring to when he says “ransom” (λύτρον)? How and why is this ransom paid? How does this concept enhance the greater context and message of the Gospels?

Attempts to answer these questions have largely led scholars to explore the linguistic and conceptual parallels between the ransom saying and other ancient texts. The discussion evolved into an attempt to postulate the most compelling background from which to understand the concept, a debate which has since continued with no current consensus. While the arguments put forth have been thoughtful and precise, they have largely ignored the broader context of the ransom saying within Mark and, even more so, within Matthew. This paper will address this lack by examining the context of Matthew to more precisely ascertain the meaning of the ransom saying. Matthew, even more than Mark, enunciates Christological themes that illumine the meaning of the ransom saying. First, however, we will explore the history of research concerning the meaning of the ransom saying.

## History of Research of the Ransom Saying

Rudolph Bultmann challenged the authenticity of the saying in Mark and Matthew through his form critical assessment that Luke 22:24–27, which excludes the reference to ransom, represents the original setting for it. Bultmann's influence led many to dismiss the saying as a later addition by Mark.<sup>1</sup> Those who seriously contemplated the meaning in Mark became convinced that the ransom saying was an allusion to Isa 52:13–53:12. Joachim Jeremias stated this position confidently as late as 1952.<sup>2</sup> By 1959, however, two preeminent scholars independently challenged this view.

C. K. Barrett argued that the proposal of Isa 53 as the background should be rejected on linguistic grounds, specifically drawing attention to the fact that *λύτρον* is never used to translate the Hebrew term *קֶדָשׁ*, which is found in Isa 53:10. Barrett dismissed other verbal connections between the passages and concluded that the themes of ransom and service are too widespread in the OT to connect these concepts to any one passage.<sup>3</sup> The Son of Man title used in the ransom saying presented a particular problem for Barrett because in Dan 7 the Son of Man neither serves nor suffers at the hands of his enemies. Rather than applying Dan 7 directly to the ransom saying, Barrett argued that the suffering of the Maccabean martyrs, which in his thinking was largely influenced by Dan 7, provided a compelling background and indirectly evoked the context of Dan 7.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Christopher Edwards, *The Ransom Logion in Mark and Matthew*, WUNT 327 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Walther Zimmerli and Joachim Jeremias, *The Servant of God*, SBT (Naperville: Allenson, 1957), 89.

<sup>3</sup> C. K. Barrett, "The Background of Mark 10:45," in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson, 1893–1958*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 1–18, 7, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Barrett specifically examined 2 Macc 4:34f.; 4 Macc 6:27f.; 17:22; 18:4 ("Background," 12–4).

This conclusion, however, is based on *conceptual* connections between Maccabees and the ransom saying rather than on *linguistic* connections. This was clearly demonstrated when he posited, “It would not be an exaggeration to say that the martyrs are here described as—*λύτρον ἀντι πολλῶν*.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, while his argument denies the conceptual connections between Isa 53 and the ransom saying, it permits such connections between the Maccabean martyrs and the ransom saying.

Likewise, Morna D. Hooker challenged the view that Isa 53 was the ideal background for the ransom saying, first in 1959 and then nearly forty years later when she reiterated her stance.<sup>6</sup> Hooker found the linguistic parallels between Isa 53 and the ransom saying lacking and contended that the suffering motif was present in other OT passages.<sup>7</sup> She also asserted that Isa 53 does not portray a vicarious death, but rather representative suffering where the Servant suffers alongside the people rather than on their behalf.<sup>8</sup> Hooker dismissed quotations from Matt 8:17 and 12:17–21 because of their application to Jesus’s healing ministry rather than his suffering. Hooker contended that quotations of Isa 53 in the NT are used as proof texts by the writers, which indicates that the greater passage from which those verses were taken should be ignored.<sup>9</sup> Hooker viewed Dan 7 as a better suited background for the ransom saying and envisioned that as Jesus faced death, “he appears to have seen his role in terms of the one like a son of man in Daniel 7, who stood for the righteous saints, persecuted because of their faithfulness to God.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Barrett, “Background,” 12.

<sup>6</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959); “Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. W. H. Bellinger and William Reuben Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 88–103.

<sup>7</sup> Hooker, “Use of Isaiah 53,” 94.

<sup>8</sup> Hooker, “Use of Isaiah 53,” 98.

<sup>9</sup> Hooker, “Use of Isaiah 53,” 90–91.

<sup>10</sup> Hooker, “Use of Isaiah 53,” 100.

Her argumentation, however, did not account for first century Jewish rules of interpretation. Hillel the elder posited seven rules of Midrash, the last of which specifically states that the entire context is implied when a statement is quoted or implied.<sup>11</sup> Matthew’s audience would have probably been familiar with this passage since it explicates the hope of restoration to Jews in exile. This hope would have resonated with both Jesus’s and Matthew’s audiences who were primarily Jews similarly under the oppression of gentiles. Both Hooker and Barrett have been criticized by scholars for their isolated treatment of texts that bolster their rejection of Isa 53 as a potential background for the ransom saying.<sup>12</sup>

After 1959 scholars continued to raise objections. For example, James D. G. Dunn questioned the linguistic connection between Isa 53 and the ransom saying. Like Bultmann, he believed it was more likely that the ransom saying was not authentic to Jesus and the allusion to Isa 53 was a later elaboration by the Gospel writers.<sup>13</sup> Instead, he postulated that Jesus viewed his death as a covenant sacrifice (e.g., Exod 24:8 and Jer 31:31–34) rather than a sin offering.<sup>14</sup> Dunn further argued that Jesus perceived his mission in similar fashion to the Maccabean martyrs and suggested that their example was the primary background from which to understand the ransom saying.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> According to C. A. Evans, all seven of these rules can be identified in the Gospels (“Midrash,” *DJG*, 544–45). For more information on the practice of NT authors citing OT verses to evoke the greater context, see G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 95–102.

<sup>12</sup> Rickie E. Watts, “Jesus’s Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: A Crux Revisited,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. W. H. Bellinger and William Reuben Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 125–151, 126. In the review of her book, *Jesus and the Servant*, Jeremias notes that Hooker “treats the New Testament like a mosaic, and examines each stone separately” (*JTS* 11 [1960]: 142).

<sup>13</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 813–15.

<sup>14</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 816–18.

<sup>15</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 817.

Werner Grimm agreed with the linguistic arguments of Barrett and Hooker and so asserted that Isa 43:3–4 was the primary background for the ransom saying. In contrast to Isa 53, Grimm argued that Isa 43:3–4 and Prov 21:18 have many linguistic parallels with the ransom saying. He noted that in Rabbinic writings, Ps 49:8, which declares that a ransom will be paid for the gentiles, and Isa 43:3–4, which proclaims that a ransom will be paid for the Jews, are interpreted together to assert that God will ransom everybody.<sup>16</sup> Grimm contended that in the Gospels these twin concepts are represented by Matt 16:26//Mark 8:37 and Matt 20:28//Mark 10:45.<sup>17</sup>

This view was echoed by Volker Hampel, who substantiated the primacy of Isa 43:3–4 by arguing for a contextual connection between Isa 43:5–7 and Matt 8:11.<sup>18</sup> He viewed the linguistic and contextual evidence for Isa 43:3–4 to be stronger than that of Isa 53. Likewise, John Nolland prefers Isa 43:3–4 to Isa 53 because of the greater linguistic parallels and wonders whether the plea of Eleazar to God to allow his sacrifice and that of the soldiers to suffice for the salvation of the people in 4 Macc 6:27–29 might also be relevant.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these apprehensions, many scholars support Isa 53 as the best background for the ransom saying. For example, Peter Stuhlmacher has argued for the legitimacy of Isa 43:3–4 as the background for the ransom saying, but only when taken in conjunction

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<sup>16</sup> Werner Grimm cites as evidence for this interpretation: Tg. Ps 49:8f.; Midr. Ps 46; 49; 146; 4 Ezra 7:106f.; 2 Bar 85:12f. (*Weil ich dich liebe: Die Verkündigung Jesu und Deuteroseja* [Bern: Lang, 1976], 242–47).

<sup>17</sup> Grimm, *Weil ich dich liebe*, 245. German translations often translate ἀντάλλαγμα as "ransom" (Lösegeld) in Mark 8:37//Matt 16:26, whereas English translations prefer the less technical idea of exchange. This difference may lead German scholars such as Grimm and Hampel to relate these verses to the ransom saying while others do not.

<sup>18</sup> Volker Hampel, *Menschensohn und historischer Jesus: Ein Ratselwort als Schlüssel zum messianischen Selbstverständnis Jesu* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 317–34.

<sup>19</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 823–26.

with Isa 51–53.<sup>20</sup> He interpreted the ransom saying through the cultic understanding of Jesus expressed by the cleansing of the temple and the last supper.<sup>21</sup> Stuhlmacher’s insistence on the incorporation of Isa 43:3–4 into the interpretation of Isa 53 derives from his contention that *λύτρον* in Mark 10:45 corresponds to *כֶּפֶר* from Isa 43:3 rather than *עֲשֵׂה* found in Isa 53:10.<sup>22</sup>

More recently, Brant Pitre’s study on the themes of exodus and exile in the NT led him to conclude that the ransom saying was a declaration of redemption consonant with the exodus and exile events in the OT.<sup>23</sup> In fact, he insightfully found the redemption theme throughout Isa 40–55, which harkens back to the exile as it grapples with the current reality of the exile.<sup>24</sup> Pitre concluded his study by saying, “In short, Jesus’s words about the ‘ransom for many’ in the end appear to be a combination of figures from Daniel and Isaiah that draws on their common hope for a New Exodus, the restoration of Israel, and the ingathering of the Gentiles.”<sup>25</sup> Combining the themes from Dan 7 and Isa 53 has support among such preeminent scholars as W. D. Davies, Dale C. Allison, and R. T. France.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Rickie Watts has even argued against Isa 43, Dan 7, and the Maccabean

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, “Jes 53 in den Evangelien und in der Apostelgeschichte,” in *Der leidende Gottesknecht: Jesaja 53 und seine Wirkungsgeschichte: mit einer Bibliographie zu Jes 53*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, FAT 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 93–106, 94.

<sup>21</sup> Stuhlmacher, “Jes 53,” 96–97.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 17, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 407.

<sup>24</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7–8; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, WBC 25 (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 70.

<sup>25</sup> Pitre, *Jesus*, 417.

<sup>26</sup> R. T. France, “The Servant of the Lord in the Teaching of Jesus,” *TynBul* 19 (1968): 26–52, 52; Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 97.

martyrs as viable backgrounds of the ransom saying in order to establish the legitimacy of Isa 53.<sup>27</sup>

This analysis demonstrates that scholars who opposed Isa 53 as the background for the ransom saying did so primarily because of the lack of linguistic connection between the two passages without consideration of the larger context of Mark or Matthew. The weakness of these arguments is seen in their insistence to *require* linguistic parallels, especially the term λύτρον. Interpreters should be cautioned against his insistence, however, because Matthew does not quote Isaiah from our current LXX and it is possible that Mark at times does not either (cf. Mark 4:12).

In addition, the LXX's use of λύτρον to translate Hebrew words such as פדוּ, כִּפֶּר, and גָּאֵל may demonstrate a developing cultic sense of λύτρον in the ancient world. Adela Yarbro Collins, for example, reviewed inscriptions found in ancient Greece and Asia Minor in which the verb λυτρούμαι described an offering to the gods for offenses. Collins argues that in these cases λυτρούμαι is used cultically to mean propitiation in a manner similar to ἱλάσκομαι.<sup>28</sup> She concludes that λύτρον in Mark 10:45 should similarly be understood in the cultic sense of a payment to the gods. Moreover, R. T. France has countered the linguistic arguments of Barrett, Hooker, and others by aptly illuminating the conceptual and *other* linguistic parallels between Isa 53 and the ransom saying.<sup>29</sup> Thus, if we take France's argument into account while also extending Collins's findings to Matthew, the ransom

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<sup>27</sup> Watts, "Jesus's Death," 140–47.

<sup>28</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Signification of Mark 10:45 Among Gentile Christians," *HTR* 90 (1997): 371–82, 375–76.

<sup>29</sup> France, "Servant," 26–52; *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 760–63; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC 25 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 94–101; see also, Rickie E. Watts, "Jesus's Death" 140–47.



saying appears to reflect the cultic sense of *λύτρον* that is found in Isa 53.<sup>30</sup>

## The Purpose and Method of This Study

This history of research demonstrates that there is no consensus on exactly which background or combination of backgrounds serve as the source of the ransom saying. This is in part because scholars are seeking to answer different questions. Form critics challenged the authenticity of the saying. Redaction critics compared the ransom saying to similar contexts in each Gospel. Canonical scholars examined allusions to ransom throughout the NT. Others based their work on a linguistic study of *λύτρον*. Many scholars theorized about Jesus's self-awareness concerning his identity and mission.

This present study will now present a philological survey of *λύτρον* in the ancient world to identify the general understanding of the term in first century Palestine. With that knowledge, we will then examine the context of Matthew from the perspective of the Inductive Biblical Studies Method, narrative criticism, and intertextuality to ascertain as far as possible the meaning of the ransom saying within the text of Matthew. These methods are helpful because they emphasize the importance of context when interpreting Scripture.

The goal of this study is to demonstrate that the ransom saying in Matt 20:28 is supported by Matthew's Christological portrayal of Jesus as the Son of Man and the suffering servant and to elucidate the meaning of the ransom saying in Matthew so that readers today might understand this saying as a product of Matthew's rhetorical goals as they relate to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For this paper, Markan priority will be assumed.

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<sup>30</sup> France contends, "Even if no linguistic echo were established, *δούναι τήν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντί πολλῶν* is a perfect summary of the central theme of Isaiah 53, that of a vicarious and redeeming death" ("Servant," 36).

## The Socio-Historical Context of Λύτρον

When Mark and Matthew employed the word λύτρον in their narratives in reference to Jesus, their audiences would have drawn upon their shared understanding of the term in that specific context. Thus, it is important to explore the potential historical semantic range of the term and how it might have been understood in Matthew.

Λύτρον originally denoted money paid for prisoners of war and later for release from slavery or other bondage. It was occasionally used cultically to refer to an offering to the gods to pay for a debt.<sup>31</sup> The LXX and Philo used λύτρον similarly, although the LXX has more cultic references.<sup>32</sup> There are references in the LXX to the manumission of slaves (e.g. Lev 19:20; 25:51, 52; 27:31), a payment given for an offense (Exod 21:30; Num 35:31–32; Prov 6:35; 13:8), a payment for the census (Exod 30:12), and a payment for land (Lev 25:24, 26).

In addition, the Levites were a ransom payment on behalf of the firstborn of Israel (Num 3:12, 46, 48–49, 51) since the firstborn of every creature was owed to God (Num 18:15). This usage is consistent with the general understanding of λύτρον as an agreed upon price between the seller and buyer. The agreement had to be documented in legal form for the arrangement to be enacted. In a cultic setting, the λύτρον was paid for a human life and the amount of payment often depended on circumstances. The deities were viewed as gracious because of their willingness to accept the ransom.<sup>33</sup>

Jews viewed λύτρον in the same manner as their non-Jewish neighbors. The payment was dependent on circumstances and only applied when the law did not have jurisdiction over a situation. For example, Josephus relates the story of Eleazar, the priest, pleading with Crassus to accept a single gold beam as a λύτρον for the rest of the

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<sup>31</sup> F. Büchsel, “λύτρον,” *TDNT* 4:340.

<sup>32</sup> Büchsel, “λύτρον,” 4:340.

<sup>33</sup> Büchsel, “λύτρον,” 4:341.

temple treasury.<sup>34</sup> Also, the Rabbis viewed λύτρον as a type of expiation, which was closely related to the concept of vicarious suffering of the righteous.<sup>35</sup>

Jews were not the only ones who interpreted λύτρον in a cultic sense. Collins's study of inscriptions involving λυτρούμαι demonstrates that Greeks used this word group cultically as well.<sup>36</sup> The inscriptions surveyed that included λύτρον and its cognates in a cultic setting often detailed a pattern of offense, misfortune, and paying a ransom for propitiation.<sup>37</sup> Since λύτρον originally was used to denote the price paid for prisoners of war and later for the price paid for the manumission of a slave, Collins concludes that the ransom paid to the gods implies an acknowledgment of enslavement of the people by the gods because of offenses the people have committed.<sup>38</sup> She viewed the cultic usage of λύτρον, then, as incorporating the concepts of the release of prisoners, manumission of slaves, and as payment to the gods to avert misfortune.

These ideas may, indeed, be inherent in the cultic use since the offender is in bondage in some sense to the gods. The cultic understanding of ransom, however, presents dissimilarities. The difference between the purely human relationships involved in prisoner exchanges or the manumission of slaves as compared with the human/god relationship in a cultic ransom payment necessarily changes the understanding of the payment. That is, in the latter, a price is paid to the gods whereby one is released from punishment for one's offenses. One is not, strictly speaking, released from literal slavery or oppression.<sup>39</sup> Regardless, the cultic practice of giving a λύτρον

<sup>34</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 6.56–59.

<sup>35</sup> Büchsel, “λύτρον,” 4:341.

<sup>36</sup> Collins, “Signification,” 375–76.

<sup>37</sup> Collins, “Signification,” 376.

<sup>38</sup> Collins, “Signification,” 377.

<sup>39</sup> Collins cites two inscriptions that imply that one is released from captivity or prison upon payment, although there is some debate concerning whether the imprisonment is literal or physical. One seems to imply that a slave was held prisoner in the temple itself (“Signification,” 378).

communicated that the gods were masters and the people were inferiors.

After an extensive word study, Timothy Howerzyl rightly concluded that when certain words within the λύω word group are used as translations for the Hebrew words פדה and להג in the OT, they demonstrate that semantic change has occurred whereby these terms at times have lost their sense of paying a price. Words such as λυτρόω, λυτροῦσθαι, and λύτρωσις denote simple deliverance in those references.<sup>40</sup> The NT usage of these terms similarly reflect this nuanced possibility of meaning; at times payment is required in the meaning of the context and at other times it is not (cf. Luke 1:68; 2:38; 24:21; Heb 9:12; Tit 2:14).<sup>41</sup>

Despite this, the same semantic change has not been demonstrated for λύτρον, which according to Howerzyl *always* requires the idea of payment even when used in the cultic sense in the LXX.<sup>42</sup> Because λύτρον always retains this sense of payment, both Collins and Howerzyl agree that in Mark 10:45 λύτρον is used primarily in this cultic sense and denotes a payment.<sup>43</sup>

This survey indicates that Jews in first century Palestine would understand the use of λύτρον as a payment for prisoners, the manumission of slaves, or a cultic offering paid to the gods for relief from a current or potential offense. The first two practices represent a monetary transaction between people, while the cultic sense represents payment made to the gods for propitiation and/or expiation.

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<sup>40</sup> Timothy Howerzyl, “Imaging Salvation: An Inquiry into the Function of Metaphor in Christian Soteriology, with Application to Mark 10:45 and the Metaphor of Ransom” (PhD Diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2015), 158–59.

<sup>41</sup> Howerzyl, “Imaging Salvation,” 158; David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 67–70.

<sup>42</sup> “Whereas λυτροῦσθαι often does have the broader meaning of deliverance or release in the LXX, the same cannot be said for λύτρον, which always carries the express meaning of price or exchange leading to release” (Howerzyl, “Imaging Salvation,” 158–65).

<sup>43</sup> Collins, “Signification,” 381; Howerzyl, “Imaging Salvation,” 180.

## The Book Context of the Ransom Saying in the Gospel of Matthew

The preceding survey of λύτρον in the ancient world provides a sense of how the Gospel writers and their readers would understand the word when they read that Jesus was to give his life as a ransom. However, the meaning of the word should also be examined within the context of Matthew. After all, context, according to David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, is “the most important factor in interpretation” and should not be overlooked.<sup>44</sup> The history of interpretation above has demonstrated that many scholars have proposed backgrounds based on the linguistic and/or conceptual connections from ancient Jewish contexts. These studies provide insightful observations but often ignore the larger contexts of Mark and Matthew as indicators of what the saying meant.

The Inductive Bible Study Method operates from “the literary principle that the book is the basic literary unit of the Bible.”<sup>45</sup> Careful observation of the larger Christological themes inherent in the texts of Mark and Matthew elucidate the background of the ransom saying. This section will focus primarily on the context of Matthew since Mark not only served as an important source for Matthew, but also Matthew’s ransom saying was taken word-for-word from Mark.

Why, then, should we consider the meaning of the ransom saying in Matthew? Each Gospel was written to different audiences with presumably diverse rhetorical goals. This section will demonstrate that Matthew developed the Christology of Jesus concerning the Son of Man and the Suffering Servant in ways that went beyond Mark. Not only does Matthew include the relevant material that Mark provides

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<sup>44</sup> *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 79.

<sup>45</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 79.

but he also presents additional material that elucidates these themes more explicitly.

### *The Son of Man*

The inclusion of the Son of Man title as a self-referent for Jesus has puzzled commentators for centuries.<sup>46</sup> The term “Son of Man” is mentioned extensively in the Gospels (thirty times in Matthew) and every reference is attributed to Jesus. This is significant because throughout the Gospel people refer to him by various titles and names but never as Son of Man. In addition, Son of Man is used as a title for Jesus outside the Gospels only in Acts 7:56.

Most commentators rightly recognize Dan 7 as the background for this referent where one like a son of man is brought before the Ancient of Days and the heavenly court to receive the kingdom that will last forever (Dan 7:9–10, 13–14). This kingdom will conquer the previous one, which itself was the last of four mighty kingdoms. The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom as well and will serve and obey the Son of Man (Dan 7:18, 22, 26–27). This scene evokes images of thrones, angels, the heavenly court, clouds, oppression, judgment, and an eternal kingdom.

Early Jewish interpretations of the son of man figure were Messianic and assumed that it referred to an individual rather than a collective entity.<sup>47</sup> This is especially evident in the *Similitudes of Enoch* where a figure distinct from the Ancient of Days is called “messiah” whose “name was named before creation” (46:1; 48:3, 10; 52:4). Similarly, 4 Ezra 13:26 envisions a messianic figure who is distinct from God, yet, preexistent. Christians generally identified the son of man

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<sup>46</sup> For a survey of this debate, see Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 306.

from Dan 7 as Jesus, which is not surprising since the Gospels were circulated as a group mere decades after his death.

Despite this, Matthew indicates that those around Jesus did not readily relate him to the Danielic figure. The first two mentions of the term are to the scribes who should have recognized its significance, and yet, the text does not indicate they were aware of his reference (Matt 8:19; 9:3). The crowd is astonished and recognizes him as a *man* to whom God has given authority (Matt 9:8). Yet, no one appears to believe that he is the Danielic son of man.

This lack of awareness is later elucidated by Jesus's question to the disciples regarding his identity (Matt 16:13–20). In Matthew's text Jesus asks, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" In Mark 8:27, by contrast, Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?" The answers—John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets—are admirable but they do not compare with the Danielic son of man (Matt 16:14). Peter gives a satisfactory answer that Jesus is the Son of God, but Matthew requires his readers to contemplate the identity of the Son of Man.

Jesus's various audiences remain ignorant of his reference throughout Matthew until Jesus boldly declares to the High Priest and those with him that they will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds in heaven (Matt 26:64). In his response, Jesus combines Dan 7:13 with Ps 110:1, a passage understood throughout the NT to be messianic. Psalm 110:1 is embedded within the Son of Man title and the description of the one like a son of man in Dan 7:13. Jewish religious leaders would not have misunderstood his intent. He is the powerful Son of Man who will come in the clouds to receive the kingdom from the Ancient of Days and have everlasting dominion (Matt 7:13–14).

Matthew further develops the connection between Jesus and the Danielic son of man by including imagery from Dan 7 in Jesus's sayings. For example, Jesus encourages the disciples with the promise of reward when the Son of Man returns in glory with the angels (Matt 16:28; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 13–14). Later, Jesus promises a day when he will

come on the clouds with power and glory (Matt 24:30–31; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 27). Matthew borrows these passages from Mark to elucidate the connection but he also inserts additional material to further emphasize this theme. He adds two lengthy parables about the Kingdom of Heaven that end with the Son of Man commanding angels to execute judgment on the people (Matt 13:37–43; 25:14–46; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 13–14, 26–27). In the latter of these, the Son of Man comes in glory with angels and sits on a glorious throne (Matt 25:31; cf. Dan 7:9–10). Matthew also includes a passage just prior to the ransom saying that promises the disciples will sit with the Son of Man on glorious thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:29–30; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 26–27). The vivid imagery in these passages contributes to the reader’s understanding that although the crowds, Jewish leaders, and disciples do not yet understand, Jesus is the Danielic Son of Man.

Another theme that extends throughout Matthew and Mark and contributes to the vivid imagery of Dan 7 is the many teachings on the Kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom was a central theme to the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). Jesus refers to the Kingdom of Heaven thirty-six times in Matthew and teaches eleven parables explicitly explaining its nature. Only one parable is shared with Mark, which means that Matthew inserts ten additional parables concerning the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>48</sup> The Kingdom motif in Matthew recalls Dan 7:26–27 where the kingdoms of the earth will be destroyed and the reign of one like a son of man and the saints of Most High will begin. In addition, in Matthew the teaching about the kingdom and the Son of Man title interact at several points.<sup>49</sup>

One final indication that Matthew wanted his readers to view Jesus in light of the Danielic son of man title is the nature of the Scripture quotations, allusions, and echoes that the author includes in connection

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<sup>48</sup> Matt 13:31–32 is shared with Mark. However, Matt 13:24–30, 33 (in common with Luke), 44, 45–46, 47–50; 18:23–35; 20:1–16; 22:1–14 (in common with Luke); 25:1–13, 31–46, are additions.

<sup>49</sup> Matt 13:18–23, 37–43; 16:13–20, 27–28; 18:1–11; 20:20–28; 25:14–46.



with it. The Old Testament references speak almost exclusively of the judgment of Yahweh. For example, Jesus calls John the Baptist Elijah in two passages and then connects Elijah to the Son of Man (Matt 11:7–19; 17:9–12). The reference is an allusion to Mal 4:5–6 where, understood in light of Mal 3:1, the prophet declares that Elijah will come before the day of the Lord to prepare the way. The Day of the Lord is a day of reckoning for Israel (Mal 4:1–3). Elijah will come to preach the message of Yahweh so that the hearts of many will turn back to him (Mal 4:5–6).

Another example is found in Jesus's accusation against the Pharisees for condemning the disciples for picking heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath. Jesus quotes Hos 6:6 and declares that the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath. The Israelites in Hos 6 have experienced judgment from Yahweh and are acknowledging their sin (Hos 5:14–6:6).<sup>50</sup> Jesus implies that the Pharisees are sinning in similar fashion and should acknowledge their sin before they too are judged.

A final example is found in the judgment scene of the sheep and goats (Matt 25:31–46), which is unique to Matthew and combines the Son of Man title with the Kingdom of Heaven using vivid imagery found in Dan 7. The Son of Man will come in glory with angels and sit on a throne while he separates the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–33). This parable is likely an allusion to Ezek 34:17–22 where Yahweh characterizes his people as sheep and goats and warns them that he will judge them for the way they have treated each other.<sup>51</sup> Yahweh then promises that he will send his shepherd to oversee his flock (Ezek 34:23–31).

In addition to these, Matthew either quotes or alludes to Gen 7:6–23, 1 Kgs 1:10; Ps 28:4, Prov 24:12, Dan 12:1–3; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Jon 1:7; Micah 7:6, and Zech 9:14; 12:10; 14:5 in order to demonstrate that the Son of Man will come in power and judge the world. These

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<sup>50</sup> Andrew J. Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 189.

<sup>51</sup> France, *Gospel*, 961.

passages contribute to the reader's understanding of Jesus as the Son of Man who will come in power like the son of man from Dan 7.

### *The Suffering Servant*

The second major theme that illumines the ransom saying is Jesus as the suffering servant. The book of Isaiah was a significant source for Mark, a point which is evidenced by the quotation attributed to Isaiah (which is a composite of Exod 23:20; Mal 3:1; and Isa 40:3) in the second and third verses of the Gospel. Watts goes so far as to postulate that the three major sections of Mark (after the prologue) are built upon Deutero-Isaiah's presentation of the New Exodus envisioned in a return from exile.<sup>52</sup>

Mark Awabdy and Fredrick J. Long have proposed that in Mark, Jesus adopts the mission to both the gentiles and the Jews as envisioned by Isaiah.<sup>53</sup> In so doing, he fulfills the role of the suffering servant who was to be a light to the nations (cf. Isa 42:6; 49:6).<sup>54</sup> Matthew, then, utilizes Mark's emphasis on Deutero-Isaiah and extends the implication that Jesus is the suffering servant.

Nevertheless, the identity of the suffering servant in Isa 40–55 is debated by scholars. Ascertaining his identity is complicated by the difference of opinion concerning whether Isa 40–55 was written prior to or during the Babylonian exile.<sup>55</sup> Regardless, Isaiah 1–39 presents Israel as a servant who must choose whether to trust God or the nations as her master (Isa 2:6–4:1; 5:1–30).<sup>56</sup> As Israel's power declines and the power of the Babylonians increases, the Israelites must decide

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<sup>52</sup> Watts, "Jesus's Death," 129–30.

<sup>53</sup> Mark Awabdy and Fredrick J. Long, "Mark's Inclusion of 'For All Nations' in 11:17d and the International Vision of Isaiah," *Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies* 1 (2014): 224–55, 236.

<sup>54</sup> Awabdy and Long, "Mark's Inclusion," 244.

<sup>55</sup> For a presentation of these differing positions, see Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 7–8; Watts, *Isaiah*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 7.

to whom they will turn in the face of either impending or realized exile. The Servant of Yahweh is introduced in this context (Isa 42:1–4) and it is his role to enact the judgment of Yahweh.<sup>57</sup> The Servant appears to be distinct from Israel because he will suffer on behalf of the people (Isa 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).

The terms that are used in conjunction with the servant are repetitious and vague, and scholars have struggled to identify this person with confidence.<sup>58</sup> The difficulty in identifying this figure becomes obvious when one looks for someone who will both enact Yahweh's vengeance and suffer on behalf of his people in such a way that will lead to their healing. Possible historical figures include: Cyrus (Isa 45:1), Darius, or an unidentified righteous sufferer.<sup>59</sup>

John Walton has suggested that Isaiah may have been presenting the imagery of the ancient practice of substitute kings whereby a person of low station would play the role of a king for an unspecified amount of time to absorb the negative consequences of evil portents.<sup>60</sup> While many theories are offered, none has proven persuasive. The diversity of opinions concerning the identity of the servant in the Servant Songs lends this figure to ambiguous and diverse applications.

Matthew's text includes nearly every quotation or allusion to Isa 40–55 found in Mark. He (1) incorporates the initial quotation concerning John the Baptist,<sup>61</sup> the allusion to Yahweh's pleasure of his servant at Jesus's baptism and transfiguration,<sup>62</sup> and the likely allusions to Isa 52:13–53:12 when Jesus predicts his suffering,<sup>63</sup> (2) compares the

<sup>57</sup> Watts, *Isaiah*, 114.

<sup>58</sup> John H. Walton provides a helpful summation of the difficulty of identifying the suffering servant in Isaiah ("The Imagery of the Substitute King Ritual in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song," *JBL* 122 [2003]: 734–43, 734).

<sup>59</sup> Watts suggests Cyrus for Isa 42:1–4 and Darius for Isa 52:13–53:12 (*Isaiah*, 114). Oswalt admits that Cyrus may be described in Isa 42:1–4 (*Isaiah*, 111).

<sup>60</sup> Walton, "Imagery," 741–43.

<sup>61</sup> Mark 1:3//Matt 3:2; cf. Isa 40:3.

<sup>62</sup> Mark 1:11//Matt 3:17; Mark 9:7//Matt 17:5; cf. Isa 42:1.

<sup>63</sup> Mark 8:31//Matt 16:21; Mark 9:31//Matt 17:22–23; Mark 10:33–34//Matt 20:17–19.

pouring out of wine to the pouring out of his blood,<sup>64</sup> (3) remains silent before his accusers,<sup>65</sup> and (4) is brought to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>66</sup>

Matthew also explicitly connects Jesus to the suffering servant in two quotations that are absent in Mark. These refer to Jesus's healing ministry (Matt 8:17; cf. Isa 53:4) and his injunction to the disciples not to tell the conspiring Pharisees his identity (Matt 12:17–21; cf. Isa 42:1–4).<sup>67</sup> Both texts begin with the fulfillment formula (*πληρωθῆν τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος*), which indicates that Matthew wanted his readers to view Jesus in light of the suffering servant figure from Isa 40–55. If one applies the final rule of Hillel to these explicit quotations as discussed previously, then the readers would have recognized them as drawing on the larger context of Isa 40–55, which tells of the sacrificial suffering of God's servant on behalf of many (Isa 53:10–12).

## The Section Context of the Ransom Saying in the Gospel of Matthew

As we have discovered, the themes of the Son of Man and the suffering servant are intentionally and abundantly connected to Jesus in Matthew. Might these major themes inform the reader concerning the background of the ransom saying? This study will now analyze the

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<sup>64</sup> Mark 14:24//Matt 26:28; cf. Isa 53:12.

<sup>65</sup> Mark 15:5//Matt 27:14; cf. Isa 53:7; so Stuhlmacher, "Jes 53," 101.

<sup>66</sup> Mark 15:42–47//Matt 27:57; cf. Isa 53:9; so Stuhlmacher, "Jes 53," 101; Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 96.

<sup>67</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury argues that the suffering servant is a minor theme that, because of parallels between Matt 12:14–21 and passages concerning the Son of God in Matthew, should be viewed as a further reference to the Son of God (*Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991], 94–96.). While the merits of this theory can be debated, the fact remains that the suffering servant is a significant theme in Matthew.

larger section and the immediate context to elucidate the meaning of the ransom saying within the larger setting of the literary work.<sup>68</sup>

### *The Segment Context of the Ransom Saying*

The ransom saying in Matthew is situated in the larger section of 16:21–20:34.<sup>69</sup> Matthew 16:21 introduces a new theme in the book: Jesus is going to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and be raised again. The verse is introduced with a formula that alerts the reader to a shift in focus of the narrative (*ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο*; cf. Matt 4:17) and anticipates Jesus's journey in Matt 16:21–20:34 where he travels from Caesarea Philippi through Galilee to Capernaum and various parts of Judea, including Jericho, where he will soon leave to enter Jerusalem (cf. Matt 16:13; 17:22, 24; 19:1; 20:29–34; 21:1).

Matthew 16:21 also begins a climactic element that is realized in the ransom saying and continues to the end of the book. The climatic development first explains the impending suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Matt 16:21–20:34) and later provides the vivid details to the story (Matt 26–28).<sup>70</sup> Matthew strengthens this climax by repeatedly providing summaries of Jesus's impending passion and resurrection within the narrative at significant intervals so that the readers are adequately prepared for what is coming at the conclusion of the story (Matt 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19).

Matthew demonstrates Jesus's knowledge and power in contrast to others throughout 16:21–20:34. Seventeen times a person approaches Jesus with a problem or question and from the viewpoint

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<sup>68</sup> For more information on identifying divisions, sections, and segments in a biblical book, consult Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 143–58.

<sup>69</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 78. For an excellent overview of the structure of the Gospel of Matthew, consult David Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Sheffield: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1989).

<sup>70</sup> Kingsbury argues that the suffering of Christ at the hands of the authorities is the "leitmotif" of Matt 16:21–28:20 (*Matthew as Story*, 12).

of the author Jesus responds appropriately and authoritatively each time.<sup>71</sup> The variety of characters who approach Jesus (e.g., religious leaders, crowds, and disciples) illustrates that no one in the text is as wise as him. This perception is enhanced by the insider knowledge that Jesus demonstrates concerning his immediate future (Matt 16:21; 17:12, 22–23; 20:17–19), the distant future that he and his disciples will share (Matt 16:27–28; 19:28–29), and other key pieces of information (Matt 17:13, 27; 19:11–12, 23–24). The inclusion of the transfiguration in this section alerts the readers that Jesus is indeed much more than a man (Matt 17:1–8).

Moreover, Jesus teaches the disciples and the crowds many lessons in this section. His favorite topic is the Kingdom of Heaven, and he claims to have knowledge of what this kingdom is like (Matt 16:28; 18:3–4, 23; 19:14, 23–24; 20:1). He consistently teaches the disciples that his followers will exhibit drastically different ethics than what they (and the readers) have come to expect, such as: if they want to save their life they must lose it; they must become like children to enter the kingdom; they need to forgive all offenses; the rich should sell their possessions; the last will be first and the first will be last; and whoever wants to be first must become a slave (Matt 16:25; 18:3, 22; 19:14, 21, 30; 20:16, 28). Jesus's teaching concerning the kingdom sets him and his disciples at odds with the expectations and realities of their surrounding culture; they must live differently.

One final consideration is that Matthew intertwines the twin Christological themes of the Son of Man and the suffering servant three times in this section. The first mention is subtle. After the transfiguration, Jesus explains that the Son of Man will suffer at the hands of the authorities (Matt 17:12). The connection between the Son of Man and suffering is new information in the book, which will become more developed as the story continues. Soon afterward Jesus expounds upon his statement by saying the Son of Man will suffer, die

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<sup>71</sup> Matt 16:22–8; 17:10–21, 24–27; 18:1–34; 19:3–21, 25–26; 19:27–20:16; 20:20–28, 30–34.

and be raised on the third day (Matt 17:22–23). Both explanations by Jesus include the verb μέλλω, which indicates that the suffering is going to happen soon. While the Son of Man will one day return to the earth in power, in the short term he will embody the role of the suffering servant.<sup>72</sup> Matthew’s incorporation of the seemingly antithetical themes of the Son of Man and the suffering servant is one reason scholars have struggled to understand the ransom saying.<sup>73</sup> Matthew has demonstrated in advance, however, that these themes are not mutually exclusive.

### *The Immediate Context of the Ransom Saying*

Matthew 20:17–28 is the climax of the larger section of 16:21–20:34. The climax is evident in the inclusion of new information when Jesus reiterates what will happen in Jerusalem. In Matthew 16:21, Jesus tells them he is going to Jerusalem and will be handed over to the Jewish authorities to suffer, die, and be raised on the third day. In Matthew 17:22–23, he adds that it is the *Son of Man* who will be handed over to the authorities to be killed and raised on the third day.

In Matthew 20:17–19, Jesus intentionally pulls the disciples off the road and tells them the Son of Man will be handed over (παραδίδωμι) to the religious authorities to be condemned and then handed over (παραδίδωμι) to the gentiles who will torture and kill him. Even so, he will be raised on the third day. The language of one being handed over to the authorities for judgment is reminiscent of Isa 53:12 where it is said that the life of the suffering servant will be handed over to death (παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον ἢ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ). This progression of information heightens the climax and introduces the immediate context of the ransom saying well. Matthew 20:17–19 also forms an inclusio with the

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<sup>72</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 184.

<sup>73</sup> Barrett acknowledges that “The real crux of the problem is the use of the title Son of Man” (“Background,” 8).

ransom saying, which helps the reader to recognize the theme of Jesus's suffering and death throughout the passage.<sup>74</sup>

In his parallel passage, Mark introduces James and John into the scene to boldly ask Jesus for preferential treatment (Mark 10:35). In Matthew's account, however, the mother of James and John comes with her sons and plays the leading role in making the request to Jesus (Matt 20:20). In the ancient world, it was the place of the mother to procure status and position for her sons.<sup>75</sup> Her respectful posture enhances the formal setting of the scene as she "approaches Jesus as one might approach an oriental monarch."<sup>76</sup> This presentation contrasts Mark's account, which includes none of the respect or appropriateness. Mark's narrative portrays the brothers as entitled to their request. The mother asks that James and John be chosen to sit one on Jesus's right hand and one on his left (εἷς ἐκ δεξιῶν σου καὶ εἷς ἐξ ἐνωπύμων), each denoting a place of power.

It appears at this point that the brothers and their mother are anticipating the near future when, as Jesus had promised, the disciples will rule on thrones in the clouds (Matt 16:27–28; 19:28). This suggests that they understand the Son of Man title in reference to Dan 7:13–14 where the mighty messiah figure will receive the everlasting kingdom from the Ancient of Days. The brothers are excited about the power and authority promised to them.

Of course, in their enthusiasm they have disregarded Jesus's teaching concerning the kingdom: if they want to save their lives they must lose them (Matt 16:25); they must become like children (Matt 18:3; 19:14); and the last will be first (Matt 19:30; 20:16). They have also ignored the many admonitions that Jesus will suffer and die in

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<sup>74</sup> Both passages demonstrate Jesus's intention to give his life and confirm that he will die. In addition, Jesus's choice to accept the impending humiliation in Jerusalem is consistent with his admonition to the disciples to humble themselves before others (20:18–29; 26–27). Jesus's sacrifice is an act of service on behalf of many (20:28).

<sup>75</sup> The request of Bath-Sheba for the throne on behalf of Solomon reflects this tradition (1 Kgs 1:15–21; cf. Matt 15:21–28) (Nolland, *Matthew*, 819).

<sup>76</sup> France, *Matthew*, 757.



Jerusalem, which is the very place they are going. The irony of their misunderstanding is made palpable by Matthew when Jesus is nailed to the cross between two thieves, with one on his right hand and one on his left (εἰς ἕκ δεξιῶν καὶ εἰς ἕξ εὐωνύμων) (Matt 27:38).

The brothers' misunderstanding continues as Jesus asks them (the mother does not reenter the scene) whether they are able to drink the cup that he is about to drink. This rhetorical question serves to emphasize the double entendre in the passage and challenges the presumption of the brothers. Visions of clouds and thrones and angels and victory dominate their thoughts, so, they boldly assert that they are surely able to drink the cup that Jesus, their king, will drink (Matt 20:22). Jesus, however, is not talking here about the distant future when they will reign with the Son of Man judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28). Rather, he is referring to the immediate future when the suffering servant will be handed over to the authorities to suffer. Jesus's reference to suffering once again includes μέλλω, which emphasizes the immediate future. The brothers are envisioning the victory cup but Jesus is referencing the cup of suffering.<sup>77</sup>

Matthew, following Mark, refers to the cup again when Jesus explains to the disciples that it represents the blood of the covenant that will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:27–28) and yet another time when he pleads with the Father to take the cup from him (Matt 26:39). These references inform the meaning of the ransom saying and enhance the understanding that Jesus will suffer vicariously on behalf of others.<sup>78</sup>

The fact that God alone decides who sits on the right and left hand of Jesus indicates that Jesus serves as an intermediary between God

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<sup>77</sup> France notes that the image of the cup is used in the OT for either blessing (Ps 16:4; 23:5; 116:13), judgment (Ps 75:8; Jer 25:15–29; Ezek 23:31–34), or suffering (Isa 51:17–23; Lam 4:21) (*Matthew*, 758). Here, it seems clear that Jesus uses the image to denote suffering, which is made evident by Jesus's declaration that James and John will drink from the cup as well and his later pleading that God might take the cup from him (26:39).

<sup>78</sup> France, *Matthew*, 758.

and his people (Matt 20:23). The economic system of the ancient world was based on patron/client relationships with brokers working between them. The fact that God alone has authority to dictate who sits on the right and left of Jesus contributes to the perception that the Father is the ultimate patron of the world and faithful people are his clients (Matt 20:22).<sup>79</sup> As such, readers in the ancient world would recognize that Matthew portrays Jesus as God's broker who works on behalf of both his patron and clients to ensure a beneficial relationship for both parties.<sup>80</sup> Jesus's healings and teachings demonstrate that he has "a spectacular credit rating" with the clients.<sup>81</sup> In this way Jesus fills the role of an intermediary between God and people throughout Matthew.

Similarly, in Dan 7 and Isa 40–55 an intermediary appears who is distinct from both God and the people. In Dan 7, the one like a son of man receives the kingdom on behalf of the saints of God (7:13–14, 18, 27). In Isa 42:1–4 God raises up a servant who will bring justice to the nations. Isaiah 52:13–53:12 portrays the servant as being exalted and then brought low before he is handed over (*παραδίδωμι*) to death while he bears the sins of many (*πολλῶν*) (Isa 53:12; cf. Matt 20:28). Like Jesus, both figures are empowered by God and use authority for the benefit of the people. The role of an intermediary in these passages further substantiates Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as the Son of Man *and* the suffering servant.

Matthew makes it clear that the other disciples were not more enlightened than James and John. Their anger at the bold request suggests that they too want to be first in the kingdom. Jesus uses their reaction to once again teach his disciples about the ethics of the

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<sup>79</sup> Eric C. Stewart, "Social Stratification and Patronage in Ancient Mediterranean Societies," in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, ed. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris (New York: Routledge, 2009), 156–66, 162.

<sup>80</sup> Alicia Batten, "Brokerage," in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, ed. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris (New York: Routledge, 2009), 167–77, 172.

<sup>81</sup> Batten, "Brokerage," 172.

kingdom. He first acknowledges the expected roles of status and power in the Gentile world in a general way and then uses that gnomic example as a foil for the kingdom expectations that he requires (Matt 20:25–27).<sup>82</sup> In Matthew, as opposed to Mark, the contrast between the gentiles and Jesus’s expectations is presented as emphatically as possible; he states what the gentiles do and then without any conjunction states what the disciples should do. This use of asyndeton denotes discontinuity between the first element and the second element since Jesus rejects the example of the gentiles in his explanation.<sup>83</sup>

Both Dan 7 and Isa 53 illustrate a similar contrast between the ineptness of the nations and God’s sovereignty. Daniel 7 tells of a kingdom that the one like a son of man inherits following the annihilation of the four Gentile kingdoms in Daniel’s dream (7:1–12, 21–22). Throughout Isa 40–55 Yahweh exerts control over various nations (e.g. 40:15–23; 43:1–4; 47:1–5). Isaiah 43:3 declares that Yahweh has given Egypt for Israel’s ransom (ἄλλαγμα) which may be a reference to Yahweh’s power over Egypt demonstrated in the exile. Jesus illustrates the contrast between the gentiles and his kingdom by once again presenting a subversive ethic: if one wants to be great then one must be a servant, and the one who wants to be first must be a slave (Matt 20:26–27).

Jesus declares the ransom saying within this literary context. It is the last of many meta-comments spoken by Jesus in Matthew that explain his mission (cf. Matt 5:17; 9:13; 10:34–36; 11:19; 15:24). This particular mention introduces new information for the reader. Jesus has told his disciples previously what will happen to him once they

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<sup>82</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, “Mark’s Interpretation of the Death of Jesus,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 545–54, 546. Not every Gentile agreed that the king should be oppressive. For an extensive treatment on the idea that the king should be a servant in Greek philosophy, see David Seeley, “Rulership and Service in Mark 10:41–45,” *NovT* 35 (1993): 234–50.

<sup>83</sup> Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 22–23.

reach Jerusalem, but here, for the first time, Jesus tells them *why he would allow himself to become vulnerable to suffering and death: to die on behalf of many.*

Matthew, like Mark, appears to include the ransom saying to provide clarification for the ironic tension realized throughout the passage. He does not rescind either his portrayal of the Son of Man or suffering servant, but combines these themes once again to demonstrate that the powerful ruler of all will intentionally sacrifice his life on behalf of his people. Where people might expect him, as the Son of Man, to be served (cf. Dan 7:27), he has instead come to serve and to give his life as a ransom on behalf of many. Jesus's declaration that he came to serve would remind the readers of his teachings, healings, and miracles, which he performed on behalf of the people. Previously, Matthew had explicitly connected these words and deeds to the suffering servant (cf. Matt 8:17; 12:17–21). As the servant, Jesus would give his life so that their sins can be forgiven (Matt 26:38). This is how Jesus will provide salvation for the people of God (Matt 1:21; 10:22; 16:25; 24:13).

The conceptual parallels between the ransom saying and the suffering servant, such as the portrayal of an intermediary between God and the people who suffers and dies for the sins of many, are compelling. As noted previously, Collins and Howerzyl rightly argued that *λύτρον* should be understood in the broader, cultic sense as a payment made to deities to mitigate offenses. The larger context of the suffering servant motif in Isaiah, which is replete with language and concepts of redemption and ransom, supports this interpretation. This is evidenced by the extensive use of *λύτρον* and its word group throughout Isa 40–55 (cf. Isa 41:11, 14; 43:1; 44:22–24; 45:13; 52:3). Referring to Isa 42:1–4 and Isa 53 would compel the readers to consider this larger context that enunciates the redemption that Yahweh promises to his people through the sacrifice of his servant.

In addition, the ransom saying is not entirely devoid of linguistic parallels. Scholars have noted the absence of *λύτρον* in Isa 53:12, but the LXX rendering of *παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον ἢ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ* in the same verse recalls Jesus's reminder to his disciples that he will be handed

over (παραδίδωμι) to the religious authorities and the gentiles (Matt 20:18–19). Furthermore, the suffering servant is said to bear the sins of many (αὐτὸς ἁμαρτίας πολλῶν ἀνήνεγκεν (cf. Matt 8:17), which provides a basis for Jesus giving his life for many (πολλῶν) to provide forgiveness for sins (Matt 26:28).

## Conclusion

When one analyzes the ransom saying in the context of Matthew, the apparent ambiguity that has frustrated scholars becomes clear. Matthew has diligently incorporated and intertwined the themes of the son of man and the suffering servant both throughout the book and in the immediate literary context of the ransom saying. This richness of contextual evidence should not be ignored for the sake of arguably stronger linguistic (Isa 43:3–4) or conceptual parallels (the Maccabean martyrs) when determining the meaning of the ransom saying. The intersection of these themes does not end in Matt 20:28 because once the passion narrative commences, the suffering servant allusions become stronger and the Son of Man allusions, which have been powerful, fade. The use of λύτρον in the ransom saying preserves the sense of a payment given and the context informs us that “many” will benefit. The payment was Jesus’s life. The concept of payment is important because it alerts the readers that they are forever indebted to Jesus for what he has done. Our sins—the offenses we commit against God and one another—have been paid by the blood of Jesus. His sacrifice has incurred a debt that we will never be able to repay.