

THE “RANSOM FOR MANY,” THE NEW EXODUS, AND THE END OF THE EXILE

Redemption as the Restoration of All Israel (Mark 10:35-45)

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Of the many difficult sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, the famous statement about the Son of Man having come to give his life as “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45) is arguably one of the most enigmatic. While exegetes continue to offer various competing interpretations of the statement, and while it has been traditionally interpreted as somehow referring to an atonement for the sins of humanity, the precise meaning of Jesus’ words continue to remain veiled in obscurity.¹ Moreover, the passage has been the subject of a long-standing scholarly debate about whether or not the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah, in particular Isaiah 52-53, are being alluded to in Jesus’ references to the Son of Man “serving” and “giving his life” for “many.”²

¹ See discussion below for examples of scholarly difficulty in interpreting the text.

² For recent discussion by prominent scholars, see especially the exchanges found in William H. Bellinger, Jr., and William R. Farmer, ed., *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1998). From this volume the following essays are of particular importance: Morna Hooker, “Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?”, 88-103; Rikki E. Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: A Crux Revisited,” 125-51; and N. T. Wright, “The Servant and Jesus: The Relevance of the Colloquy for the Current Quest for Jesus,” 281-97. For other references, see also Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, 34b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 109-125; W. D. Davies, Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary, 28 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997), 3:94-100; Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2, 88 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997), 270-87; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 579-91; Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 251-56; Volker Hampel, *Menschensohn und historischer Jesus: Ein Rätselwort als Schlüssel zum messianischen Selbstverständnis Jesu* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 326-33; Peter Stuhlmacher, “Vicariouly Giving His Life for Many, Mark 10:45 (Matt 20:28),” in *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 16-29; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 273-83; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology I. The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: SCM, 1971), 292-94; Jeremias, “Das Lösegeld für Viele (Mk 10.45),” in *Abba: Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 216-29; Morna Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1959); C. K. Barrett, “The Background of Mark 10:45,” in *New Testament Essays*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 1-18.

While to my mind the arguments favoring an Isaianic background are stronger, the debate continues, and even those scholars who agree that Isaiah lies behind the text are still left with unanswered questions about the exact meaning of Mark 10:45.³ In this essay, I would like to advance a fresh interpretation of the “ransom for many,” not by rehashing arguments about Isaiah, but rather by focusing on those aspects of the wider Old Testament background of the text which are often overlooked but which provide important keys to its meaning.

First, I will argue that the “ransom saying” should be interpreted in light of the Danielic background present throughout Mark 10:35-44, and not isolated from the preceding material.⁴ When this is done, it becomes clear that the request of James and John that leads to the ransom saying presupposes the vision of the eschatological kingdom described in Daniel 7, with Jesus as the royal “one like a Son of Man” and themselves as the exalted “saints of the most high.” This Danielic background, combined with the role of the Twelve as representatives of the twelve tribes, establishes an initial link to the eschatological restoration of Israel. Second, I will argue that Jesus’ ominous response to James and John about having to suffer before being exalted also presupposes the Danielic vision of the kingdom, but focuses on the sufferings of the eschatological tribulation that will precede the exaltation of the “Son of Man.” Third, I will suggest that Jesus ties the royal figure of the “Son of Man,” who suffers in the tribulation in Daniel 7, to the royal figure of the “Messiah,” who dies in the eschatological tribulation in Daniel 9, and that this is the origin of his claim that the Son of Man must “give his life.” This point will be crucial to the overall argument, because the purpose of the tribulation in Daniel is to atone for the sins that led Israel into exile and inaugurate the restoration of Israel and the end of the exile.⁵ Finally, I will attempt to

³ See especially the comments of Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:100 (cited below).

⁴ The tendency to treat Mark 10:45 in isolation from its surrounding context—despite the fact that there is no clear textual justification for doing so—is so widespread that it almost needs no documentation. For a recent example, see James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 812-15.

⁵ Throughout this essay, I will use the terminology of the “end of the exile,” the “restoration of Israel,” and the “new exodus” to refer to roughly the same event: the ingathering of the scattered tribes of Israel from among the Gentiles to Zion. For fundamental differences between my understanding of this concept and that of N. T. Wright, see Brant James Pitre, “The Historical Jesus, the Great Tribulation, and the End of the Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004), 31-40. As I argue there, whereas Wright speaks of a metaphorical “end” of the Babylonian exile of the Jews (587 B.C.), I am speaking primarily of a real return from exile by all twelve tribes, including those scattered during the Assyrian exile (722 B.C.). In other words, I have in mind the restoration of all Israel in an eschatological kingdom. For a recent treatment of these themes in Acts, see David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament. 2, 130 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

show that Jesus' words about the "ransom" for "many" fit squarely into this eschatological context by demonstrating that the terminology draws on the widespread Old Testament hope for the restoration of all Israel: that is, the ingathering of the scattered tribes—including the lost ten tribes of the northern kingdom—in a new exodus.

When seen in the light of these points, Jesus' otherwise mysterious words in Mark 10:45 become amazingly clear. He is declaring that the messianic Son of Man will give his life in the eschatological tribulation in order to release ("ransom") the scattered tribes of Israel (the "many") from their exile among the Gentile nations. That is, he will give his life, in a kind of new Passover, in order to bring about a New Exodus: the long-awaited return from exile.

The Exaltation of the Twelve in the Eschatological Kingdom

Mark 10:35-45 is easily demarcated from its surrounding context.⁶ Scholarly opinion, however, is divided on whether it constitutes a single unified passage, or should be broken down into two or even three parts. I have argued elsewhere in greater detail that the passage should be treated as a single unit.⁷ For reasons of space, I will presuppose these arguments here, and hope that the explanatory power of the exegesis offered herein is itself a convincing argument for the unity of the text.

The unit of Mark 10:35-45 begins with James and John approaching Jesus and asking him: "Give to us that we should sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:37). Although commentators who would break up the text into various pieces often pass remarkably quickly over this text,⁸ a proper understanding of the Old Testament background of their request is crucial for grasping the unity and significance of the rest of the dialogue. In short, the request of James and John appears to presuppose the vision of Daniel 7, in which "one like a Son of Man" is exalted in the eschatological kingdom along with the "saints of the Most High." While greater certitude that Daniel is in fact in view will only come through further examination of Jesus' responses to the Twelve,

⁶ See, e.g., Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 113-115.

⁷ See, Pitre, "The Historical Jesus, the Great Tribulation, and the End of the Exile," 490-497.

⁸ See, e.g., D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), 278-279, who fails to discuss the request of James and John in any detail whatsoever.

for now let it suffice to notice the striking convergence of images with Mark 10:35-45 as a whole:

As I looked, *thrones* were placed,
and one that was ancient of days took his seat ...
his throne was fiery flames ...
the court *sat in judgment*,
and the books were opened....

And to [*the one like a Son of Man*] was given dominion
and *glory and kingdom*,
that all peoples, nations, and languages should *serve* him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed....

But *the court shall sit in judgment* ...
And *the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness*
of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High,
their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,
and all dominions shall serve and obey them.

(Dan. 7:9-10, 14, 26-27)⁹

At this point, the parallels are few, but strong: images of the disciples “sitting,” presumably on thrones (Mark 10:37), with a “Son of Man” (Mark 10:45) who has been given “glory” (Mark 10:37)—all of these make it reasonable to suggest that James and John appear to view Jesus as the royal “one like a Son of Man” and themselves as the (soon-to-be) exalted “saints of the Most High.” Hence, their request establishes a theme of eschatological rule and glorification, and this theme is not completed until Jesus’ explicit mention of the Son of Man in Mark 10:45 hearkens back to the thrones and glory of Daniel 7.¹⁰

If there should be any doubt, however, about the royal and eschatological nature of the brothers’ request, two further points might prove helpful. First, although there is no explicit mention of a “kingdom”

⁹ All translations of the Old Testament contained herein are, unless otherwise noted, from the Revised Standard Version. All New Testament translations are the author’s own.

¹⁰ For arguments favoring the presence of Daniel 7 behind Jesus’ words in Mark 10:45, see esp. Morna D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London: S.P.C.K., 1967), 103-47.

in Mark 10:37, its terminology is certainly royal. Indeed, the specific image of sitting at Jesus' "right hand" (ἐκ δεξιῶν) and "left hand" (ἐξ ἁριστερῶν; ἐξ ἐναντίων) (Mark 10:37, 40) is clearly regal in character. Such language is often used in the Old Testament and Second Temple literature to depict sitting at the right and left hand of a king.¹¹ Moreover, this royal context is confirmed by the specific image of sitting beside Jesus in his "glory" (δόξη) (Mark 10:37).

While the terminology of "glory" is used in a vast array of contexts in the Old Testament,¹² it very frequently refers to the royal glory of a king, whether God¹³ or a human being.¹⁴ Specifically, it is often used in conjunction with the image of being seated on *thrones* "of glory"—that is, being given positions of royal authority alongside a king.¹⁵ One notable juxtaposition of these images is found in Isaiah's account of Eliakim, who, when raised to the office of "prime minister"¹⁶ in the royal court of King Hezekiah, receives not only "the key of the house of David" and the authority to "open and shut," but also becomes a "throne of glory" (Isa. 22:23). In this instance, to "sit" on a throne of "glory" would be to have the highest office within the Davidic kingdom.¹⁷ Hence, the request of James and John is not simply a friendly request to recline in close proximity to Jesus at the "messianic banquet,"¹⁸ or merely a plea to be with him at "the

¹¹ For example, during the reign of Solomon, the "queen mother," Bathsheba, is honored by having a "seat" or "throne" (θρόνος) brought in for her so that "she sat at his [the king's] right hand" (ἐκάθισεν ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ), according to the Greek Septuagint translation (LXX) of 1 Kings 2:19. Similarly, the Sons of Korah praise the "throne" (θρόνος) of a newly anointed king, and rejoice that "at your right hand (ἐκ δεξιῶν σου) stands the queen in gold of Ophir" (Ps. 44:7-10 LXX). One of the most famous enthronement psalms begins, "The LORD says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand' (κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου) till I make your enemies your footstool" (Ps. 110:1 LXX)—clearly a royal setting of honor and glory. For further references, see 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18; *Testament of Abraham* 12:8; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 6.235.

¹² For "glory" as dangerous presence of God, see Exod. 16:7; 24:16; 33:18-22; Lev. 9:6, 23; Num. 14:10; 1 Sam. 4:21-22. For "glory" as God coming in "a cloud" or "clouds" (see Daniel 7), see Exod. 16:10; 24:16; 40:34-35; Num. 16:42; Deut. 5:22-24; 1 Kings 8:11; Ezek. 10:4.

¹³ Cf. Pss. 24:7-10; 57:5, 11; 72:19; 96:3, 7; 102:15; 108:5; 145:11-12; 1 Chron. 29:11-12; Isa. 6:3; 60:1-3; 66:18-19; Hab. 2:14.

¹⁴ Cf. 2 Chron. 1:12; 17:5; 32:27; Job 19:9; Ps. 8:5; Prov. 25:2.

¹⁵ The Lord sits on a "throne of glory" (Jer. 14:21; 17:12) and can exalt others to this status (1 Sam. 2:8).

¹⁶ The technical term is "over the house" (Isa. 22:15), but this is difficult to render into English.

¹⁷ It is of course precisely this text from Isaiah that forms the background of the account in which Peter as chief of the Twelve is given the "keys of the kingdom" and the power to "bind and loose" in Matthew's gospel (Matt. 16:16-19; cf. also Matt. 18:18). See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 2:640 for further discussion.

parousia.”¹⁹ It is a formal and direct request to receive the highest offices and authority (next to that of Jesus himself) in the eschatological kingdom.

The second point is more remote, but still important. In short, one could even argue that this royal imagery is implicitly *Davidic* insofar as the disciples’ request presupposes the restoration of the kingdom *to all twelve tribes* (represented by the apostles)—a reality which only existed during the time of the Davidic kingdom under David and Solomon, before the time when the tribes split and the monarchy was divided (see 1 Kings 12).²⁰ The plausibility of this interpretation is supported by parallel visions of eschatological exaltation found elsewhere in the gospel tradition:

Truly I say to you, in the new creation, when *the Son of Man shall sit on his throne of glory*, you who have followed me shall also *sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*.

(Matt. 19:28)

You are those who have continued with me in my trials; *so do I appoint to you—just as my Father appointed to me—a kingdom*, so that you may eat and drink at my table *in my kingdom*, and *sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*.

(Luke 22:28–30)

Whatever the differences between these texts, they both, like Mark 10:35–45, presuppose the exaltation of the disciples to royal places of honor alongside Jesus as both king (Luke) and Son of Man (Matthew). And this is all tied to the eschatological restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel and the advent of the kingdom. This link between the request of James and John, the disciples as representatives of the twelve tribes, and the

¹⁸ Cf. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 246. While regal and convivial imagery are, admittedly, not necessarily mutually exclusive (see Luke 22:28–30), the immediate context does not suggest a banquet. See John Meier, who argues that the terminology of “sitting” (καθίζω; καθήμεν) is not the usual Greek terminology for “reclining” at table in banquet settings but rather connotes sitting in judgment in a royal setting. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 3 vols. (Doubleday 1991), 3:218, following S. Légasse, “Approche de l’épisode préévangélique des fils de Zébédée (Marc x.35–40 par.),” *New Testament Studies* 20 (1974): 170–74.

¹⁹ Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 116, is quite correct to insist that the reference to Jesus’ glory does not necessarily refer to “the parousia”: “[I]n the setting of the life of Jesus (*Sitz im Leben Jesu*), the question refers to the kingdom of God on earth, that is *the restored Israel* in which the great prophecies (especially of Isaiah) will be fulfilled, when all nations will come to Jerusalem to worship the LORD” (emphasis added). Contrast Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 2d. ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966), 440.

²⁰ In this regard, the parallels between the three mighty men of King David and Jesus’ three disciples—Peter (the “rock”), and James and John (the “sons of thunder”)—are at least suggestive (see 1 Sam. 23:8–12; cf. Mark 2:23–28).

restoration of Israel cannot be allowed to slip from view, for it will prove very important for further exegesis.

The Suffering of the Son of Man in the Tribulation

If any doubt should exist regarding whether or not Daniel 7 lies behind the disciples' request, the suggestion should be confirmed by Jesus' own response. For he counters the brothers' desire for exaltation—which drew on Daniel—with images from the very same text: the example of “great” Gentile rulers who are tyrants (Dan. 7:3-8, 11-12), the language of “serving” rather than being served (see Dan. 7:14, 27), and the promise of suffering for the disciples. For in Daniel, it is quite clear that those who are ultimately exalted, the saints of the Most High, *will first have to suffer during the eschatological tribulation*. They “shall be given over” into the hand of the final eschatological tyrant “for a time, two times, and half a time” (Dan. 7:25).

It is this last point, that the saints in Daniel will have to suffer the tribulation before their exaltation, which explains Jesus' otherwise baffling response to James and John. While the brothers are eager to be exalted alongside their teacher in his glory, they have forgotten that the glorious kingdom spoken of by Daniel will only be established *after* a period of eschatological tribulation. Jesus apparently recognizes their failure to grasp this point, and he reminds them of it by asserting: “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup which I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (Mark 10:38).

These words, although enigmatic, provide an important clue to understanding Mark 10:45. They suggest that the suffering of Jesus, as Son of Man, will take place in the eschatological tribulation. Indeed, as the majority of scholars agree, the image of the cup in Mark 10:38 is a metaphorical “cup” of suffering.²¹ Similarly, the image of being “baptized,” of being submerged, is also employed in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism as a metaphor for undergoing suffering.²² What is

²¹ While the image can be used positively to depict the “cup” of blessing (Pss. 23:5; 116:13), it is more often the case that it is used negatively to refer to the “cup” of sorrow and suffering. See, with various shades of meaning, Pss. 75:7-8; 115:7; Isa. 51:17-23; Ezek. 23:32-34; Hab. 2:16-17; Jer. 49:12; Lam. 4:21; Jer. 25:16, 27, 29, 31, 33, 34-38. Similar usage of the “cup” of suffering and judgment continues in the Second Temple period. See *Psalms of Solomon* 8:14-15, and the Qumran documents *Peshier on Habbakuk* 11:14; *Prayer of Nabonidus* 4:6. Cf. also Rev. 14:10; 16:19; 18:6; *Ascension of Isaiah* 5:13; *Testament of Abraham* 1:3; Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans* 7:3; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:2. For other references and discussion, see Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 803; Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 3:263, n. 50; Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 117; Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 2 vols. Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 2:156-57.

striking about this second image, however, is that the “baptism” of Jesus is used elsewhere in the gospels with reference to the distress that Jesus will undergo *in the eschatological tribulation*:

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish that it
were already kindled! *I have a baptism to be baptized with;*
and how I am constrained until it is fulfilled!

(Luke 12:49-50)

Regarding these strange verses, many scholars agree that Jesus’ language of being “baptized” with a “baptism” refers to nothing less than his own anguish and suffering in the eschatological tribulation.²³ If so, then my suggestion—that Jesus is reminding James and John that the saints in Daniel must first suffer the tribulation before being exalted in the eschatological kingdom—is confirmed.

More important than the fate of James and John, however, is the fate of Jesus as Son of Man. For he again refers to the Danielic tribulation, with far more specificity, when he calls the Twelve together and readjusts their thinking by reminding them they will not be like “the great” among “the Gentiles.” Rather, greatness among the Twelve will consist of being a “servant” and “slave” of the others (Mark 10:42-43). The reason: “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The first and most important link between these final words of Jesus and the eschatological tribulation is, of course, the presence of the expression “the Son of Man.” This term of course points us back to the visions of Daniel 7 and to the tribulation described therein. But this more

²² See, e.g., 2 Sam. 22:4-7, 17-18; Pss. 18:4-6, 16-17; 32:6; 42:7; 69:1-2, 13-17; 124:1-5; 144:7-11; Job 22:11. While I am not sure how much should be made of the point, it is at least intriguing that, given the messianic context of James and John’s request and Jesus’ response, the imagery of being “baptized” in a flood of suffering, occurs repeatedly in the thanksgiving psalms of *David*. Since Jesus does in fact seem to accept the royal status ascribed to him by James and John (Mark 10:40), he may be countering their vision of royal exaltation by invoking an image used repeatedly in the psalms of David to depict the suffering and distress of the “king,” “messiah,” and “servant” of the Lord (2 Sam. 22:51; Pss. 69:17; 144:10). For other references to baptism as suffering in the primary sources, see, for example, Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 366, n. 129; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3:263-64, n. 51; Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 124-28.

²³ See, e.g., Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 808-809; Dale C. Allison, Jr., “The Eschatology of Jesus,” in *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, vol. 1 of *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. John J. Collins (New York: Continuum, 1998), 288-89; Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus*, 123-24; Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 124-28; Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 213.

obvious connection is also confirmed by other aspects of Jesus' words. In particular, his distinctive mention of "the great" (οἱ μεγάλοι) among "the Gentiles" (τῶν ἔθνῶν) whose rulers "lord it over" (κατακυριεύουσιν) their subjects, is evocative of the Danielic "great (μεγάλα) beasts" who are Gentile kings and who, during the last days, will "lord it over many" (κατακυριεύσει . . . ἐπὶ πολὺ) (LXX Dan. 7:3-11; 11:39 in Symm., the Greek translation of Symmachus).

Moreover, Jesus contrasts the Gentile kings' tyranny over "many" with the lordship of the Son of Man, whom he insists "did not come to be served (διακονηθῆναι) but to serve (διακονῆσαι)," and to give his life as a ransom "for many" (ἀντὶ πολλῶν) (Mark 10:45). This is a striking claim in light of the fact that in Daniel 7 the "one like a Son of Man" is given dominion so that "all peoples, nations, and languages should serve (δουλεύουσιν) him" (Dan. 7:14 Theod.). Indeed, Jesus appears not only to be overturning the expectations of James and John regarding the messianic kingdom, but conclusions that could be drawn straight from the visions of the "one like a son of man" in Daniel itself.²⁴ In so doing, he is directly tying his (and possibly the disciples') imminent suffering to the eschatological tribulation described in Daniel 7.²⁵

This being said, one important issue remains unresolved: while Daniel 7 certainly describes the persecution of the saints/Son of Man, it does not describe their execution, and it is execution (or death of some sort) that is suggested in Mark 10:45.²⁶ The Son of Man spoken of by Jesus will not only suffer but will also die—he will "give his life" as a ransom "for many."

At this point interpreters often turn to Isaiah 53 to show its influence on Jesus' words.²⁷ And, although the passage probably did have an influence, I would suggest that another text in Daniel provides the backdrop for the suggestion that the Son of Man would die as a ransom for many. Indeed, if this text is read as an eschatological prophecy (as a first-century Jew would have done) and not as an apocalyptic allegory of

²⁴ Compare for example, Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 814; Stuhlmacher, "Vicariouly Giving His Life for Many," 21; Seyoon Kim, *The Son of Man as the Son of God*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 30 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983) 39-40; Barrett, "The Background of Mark 10:45," 8-9.

²⁵ Along these lines, see Hooker, "Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?" 100, and *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 250; Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, 260-61; Barrett, "The Background of Mark 10:45," 10-14.

²⁶ Although in Daniel 7 the Son of Man can be read as suffering via the saints of the Most High, there is certainly no explicit description of his suffering and *death*. The emphasis is entirely on the persecutions of the saints: the Son of Man only comes on the scene for vindication, not tribulation.

²⁷ See, e.g., Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:95-96; Watts, "Jesus' Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45," 136-47; Stuhlmacher, "Vicariouly Giving His Life for Others," 19-20; Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 292-94.

political events of the second century B.C. (as most modern scholars do²⁸), it quite clearly describes at least three things: the coming death of the Messiah during a period of eschatological tribulation; the atoning function of the tribulation; and the end of the exile:

²⁴Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning you people and your holy city, *to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy one.* ²⁵Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of a *Messiah, a prince*, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶And after sixty-two weeks, *a Messiah shall be cut off*, and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. *His end shall come with a flood*, and to the end there shall be war; desolations are decreed. ²⁷And *he shall make a strong covenant with many* for one week; and for half of the week he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease; and upon the wing an abomination that makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.

(Dan. 9:24-27)²⁹

Several points need to be made about this crucial text. The first is somewhat obvious, but extremely important. In short, while this Old Testament prophecy of a dying Danielic Messiah is often overlooked in discussions of Mark 10:45, the text is quite clear. There shall be a future period of eschatological tribulation in which a royal Messiah will not only come, but will be *killed*.³⁰ Hence, the death of the coming Messiah shall not take place just anytime, but *during the tribulation*, during the “seventy weeks of years” of trouble and war that must take place before the restoration of Jerusalem.³¹

²⁸ John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 352-60, for his and other modern interpretations.

²⁹ RSV, slightly modified.

³⁰ This is the meaning of the Hebrew idiom “he will be cut off” (יִכָּרֵט). Cf. Gen. 9:11; 41:36; Ps. 37:9; Isa. 11:13; 29:20, etc.

Second, the primary purpose of this tribulation is *to atone for Israel's sin*: "to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity" (Dan. 9:24). This threefold purpose is expressly stated by the angel Gabriel, and reveals that the eschatological suffering described will not only be punitive, but redemptive and restorative, ushering in the time of "everlasting righteousness" and the restoration of Jerusalem.

Third—and this is crucial—the forgiveness of sins that is wrought by the tribulation will mean nothing less than *the end of Israel's exile*. This point, although not explicitly stated in Daniel 9:24-27, is nevertheless quite clear from the surrounding context, which focuses on Jeremiah's prophecy of exile (Dan. 9:2; cf. Jer. 25, 29), the scattering of all Israel to "all the lands to which you [the LORD] have driven them" in the Exile (Dan. 9:7), as well as the Deuteronomic curses of calamity and exile in "the law of Moses" (Dan. 9:11-13; cf. Lev. 26:27-45; Deut. 28:15-68). In other words, the eschatological tribulation described by Gabriel is nothing less than the climax of Israel's exilic sufferings. In this vein, Daniel implores the Lord to bring Israel out of exile just as he had brought them "out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand" (Dan. 9:15)—that is, in a new exodus. This new exodus will mean a new deliverance from exile, a new return of the twelve tribes to the promised land.

In short, Daniel has just finished praying for the forgiveness of Israel's sins and the restoration of Israel in a new exodus (Dan. 9:7-19). In response, Gabriel promises him a period of tribulation that will atone for iniquity (Dan. 9:24-27). The obvious implication of this exchange is that the sufferings of the tribulation—including one of the most striking afflictions, the death of the Messiah—will not only bring about the forgiveness of sins, but also its biblical corollary: the end of the exile.³²

The final step in this exegesis of the Old Testament background of Mark 10:35-45 is to recognize that Jesus' statements are not only drawing on both Daniel 7 and 9 but *combining* these two texts into a

³¹ This single text renders inexplicable statements such as those of Hartmut Stegemann that *nowhere* "in all pre-Rabbinic Judaism is the possibility ever entertained that the coming Messiah can be killed." (*The Library of Qumran: On the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist, and Jesus* [Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998], 104). Daniel 9 not only entertains the possibility, it describes the event in an eschatological prophecy.

³² As N. T. Wright has brilliantly argued, in the Old Testament, "Forgiveness of sins is another way of saying 'return from exile'" (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 268-274). While we do not have the space here to defend this suggestion, see his discussion, as well as Lev. 26:33; cf. 26:43; Lam. 4:22; Jer. 31:10-12, 31-34; Ezek. 36:24-34; cf. also 37:15-28; Isa. 40:1-11. I would add also the important text of 1 Kings 8:33-34. In this hypothesis, Wright is followed by Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 224-27.

“composite messianic picture.”³³ For Jesus, the royal “one like a Son of Man” who comes during the tribulation (Daniel 7) and the “Messiah, a prince,” who also comes during the tribulation (Daniel 9), *are the same eschatological figure*.

This is a crucial point, for it explains why Jesus would even suggest that “the Son of Man” would die in the tribulation when no such death is described in Daniel 7. He recognizes that both Daniel 7 and 9 describe *the same tribulation*, the tribulation of the last days, which will precede the establishment of the “everlasting kingdom” in “everlasting righteousness” (see Dan. 7:27; 9:24). As a result, he is harmonizing the royal and messianic figures of both into one.³⁴

Once this point is grasped, several other aspects of Mark 10:35-45 as a whole become clear. For example, Jesus’ curious use of the image a “baptism” to refer to his impending suffering in the tribulation can be explained if he is drawing on Daniel’s visions of the coming of the Messiah during the final tribulation; for Daniel prophesies that “his end”—that is, the death of the Messiah—would come “with a flood” (Dan. 9:27). Also, the giving of the Son of Man’s life for “many” finds a parallel in the “covenant” made by the messianic prince with “many” before the end of the tribulation (Dan. 9:27).

Finally, in both the words of Jesus and in Daniel, the purpose of these events appears to be linked with atonement for sin. In Daniel, the events of the final tribulation—the death of the Messiah, the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and the covenant with “many”—are somehow thought to finish the transgression of Israel and to atone for the sin that brought about the exile (Dan 9:24). In parallel fashion, the words of Jesus

³³ The terminology is that of Wright, who argues that Jesus combines the same two Danielic texts elsewhere: “Jesus in Mark 13 has already alluded to Daniel 9; when we find, shortly afterwards, a quotation from Daniel 7, we are fully justified in assuming that this composite messianic picture is in mind. Nor is it simply a general evocation of vague ‘messianic’ ideas. The picture is very sharp: this Messiah-figure will bear the brunt of gentile-fury, and will be vindicated. When we put this alongside Dan. 9:24-27, the complete picture includes the real end of the exile, the final atonement for sin, the anointing of a most holy place, the arrival of an anointed prince, the ‘cutting off’ of an anointed one, the cessation of the sacrifices, and the setting up of the ‘abomination that desolates’. It looks as though the combination of Daniel 7 and 9 provides part of the major theme of Jesus’ Temple-discourse, in the middle of which the clear implication is that the Temple’s destruction and Jesus’ own vindication, *precisely as Messiah*, somehow belong together” (emphasis original). Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 515.

³⁴ Despite the modern hesitancy to view the “one like a Son of Man” in Daniel 7 as a Messiah, it should be noted that the oldest extant Jewish interpretations of the “one like a Son of Man” in Daniel, *1 Enoch* 46 and *4 Ezra* 13, are explicitly messianic (as is admitted by Collins, *Daniel* 306-307). Hence, Jesus’ combination of the two figures, although distinctive, would fit quite squarely into early Jewish interpretation of Daniel 7.

in Mark 10:45 suggest that the death of the Son of Man will effect some kind of redemptive atonement—a “ransom”—for some as yet unidentified group, “the many.”

The ‘Ransom for Many’ and the End of the Exile

While recourse to Daniel illuminates Jesus’ words about his own “baptism” of suffering and the death of the Son of Man in the tribulation, it does not say anything explicit about this death functioning as a “ransom for many.” Indeed, the terminology of “ransom” or release occurs nowhere in either Daniel 7 or 9.

Again, this is often where interpreters of Mark 10:45 leave Daniel aside and turn to Isaiah 53 to show how the servant makes his “life” an “offering for sin” to “bear the sin of many” (Isa. 53:10, 12).³⁵ And again, these images do suggest a connection between Mark 10:45 and Isaiah 53, even if the former is not explicitly “citing” the latter. Nevertheless, even scholars who accept the Isaianic background do not necessarily achieve total clarity regarding the meaning of Jesus’ words. Notable here is the conclusion of W. D. Davies and Dale Allison:

[A]lmost every question we might ask remains unanswered. What is the condition of ‘the many’? Why do they need to be ransomed? To whom is the ransom paid—to God, to the devil, or to no one at all? Is forgiveness effected now or at the last judgment or both? How is its appropriated? . . . We have in the Gospel only an unexplained affirmation.³⁶

These are important questions, which need to be answered; but to a large extent they have not yet received a satisfactory answer in the scholarly literature.³⁷ However, I submit that they can be answered by properly placing Jesus’ language of a “ransom” for “many” in the context of the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism and by continuing to keep in mind

³⁵ See similar moves regarding Mark 9:12 as the context for Mark 10:45 in Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45,” 131-36.

³⁶ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:100.

the eschatological tribulation in the book of Daniel.

When this is done, it becomes clear that in Mark 10:45, Jesus is using the language of the Old Testament prophets to declare that the Son of Man will give his life in order to release (“ransom”) the scattered exiles of Israel (the “many”). That is, he will give his life, in a kind of new Passover, in order to bring about a new exodus: the return from exile. Jesus’ declaration is a biblically evocative declaration about the new exodus (the “ransom”) and the restoration of the lost tribes of Israel (the “many”). This can be demonstrated by a brief survey of both images in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism.

In the Greek Old Testament, the terminology of “ransom” (Gk. λυτρόω; λύτρον) can have several dimensions of meaning, but on a very basic level the verbal form, λυτρόω, means to “release by payment of ransom,” while the nominal form, λύτρον, refers to “the price of release, ransom.”³⁸ Both forms are most commonly employed to translate the Hebrew terms “ransom” (פְּדוּת) and “redeem” (גָּאַל) (and, less frequently, “atone” [כִּפֹּר]). Whichever of the two primary Hebrew terms is used, the basic meaning of *release* or *deliverance* by way of *payment* is almost always retained, whether the context is one of deliverance from punishment (human³⁹ or divine⁴⁰), slavery,⁴¹ debt,⁴² guilt or sin,⁴³ affliction,⁴⁴ and even death.⁴⁵ For our purposes, what is striking about this terminology is that it is perhaps most prominently used to describe a very particular type of

³⁷ Signs of struggle similar to those found in Davies and Allison regarding what Mark 10:45 actually means are present throughout scholarly literature on the subject. To cite a few examples: Morna Hooker, after all of her work on this passage, can only conclude that “In some mysterious way, which is not spelt out, the sufferings of one man are used by God to bring benefit to others” (*The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 249). What is the “mysterious way”? And what is the “benefit”? Is this all we can say about this text, after all the wrangling about the Isaianic background? Ben Witherington states quite clearly: “We are not told in Mark 10:45b what the many are freed from” and then goes on to conjecture that “in view of Jesus’ exorcisms, he was thinking of freeing them from Satan’s grasp; freeing God’s people from sin may be in view” (*The Christology of Jesus*, 256). This is a good surmise, but again, the text says nothing about either “Satan” or “sin,” nor does its terminology implicitly evoke either of these. George Beasley-Murray concludes that “the Son of Man in Mark 10:45” gives his life as “a freely offered sacrifice, in order that the kingdom of God might be opened for mankind in its totality” (*Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 283). But does the text say anything at all about “opening” the kingdom of God to “mankind in its totality”? And again, how does this work? Is there anything in early Judaism or the Old Testament to suggest that the kingdom of God could be (or would need to be) “opened” through the death of an individual? These examples could easily be multiplied. What is important to note, however, is that in each case, the exegete is forced to leave the text behind and create (or at least substitute) interpretive categories from some other source that will make some sense out of Jesus’ words, but with the effect that they remain ultimately opaque.

³⁸ See J. Lust et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992, 1996), 2:286.

deliverance: deliverance or release *from exile*.

This fact is rarely noted by commentators on Mark 10:45, who almost invariably move quickly from a study of the meaning of the word "ransom" (λύτρον) into the scholarly debate over the Isaianic background of Jesus' words. This debate has distracted exegetes from observing how deeply Jesus' terminology is rooted in the *rest* of the Old Testament, especially the prophets, outside of Isaiah.⁴⁶

The fact is that "ransom" (λυτρόω) terminology is used over and over again in the Old Testament to depict two prominent events in salvation history: Israel's past deliverance from exile in Egypt in the exodus, and its

³⁹ Num. 35:31, 32.

⁴⁰ Exod. 30:12; Hos. 7:13; Sir. 49:10. For many more references, see those listed below on enslavement to Egypt or the nations in exile.

⁴¹ Lev. 19:20; 25:48, 49, 51, 52, 54; Exod. 21:8. This can be applied to the freeing of the land from its labor (Lev. 25:24).

⁴² Lev. 25:25; 27:15, 19, 20, 27, 31.

⁴³ Deut. 21:8; Pss. 25:22; 26:11; 32:7; 103:4; 130:8.

⁴⁴ 2 Sam. 4:9; 1 Kings 1:29; Pss. 7:2; 31:5; 34:22 (cf. v. 19); 55:18; 59:1; 69:18; 72:14; 118:34, 154; 144:10; Sir. 48:20.

⁴⁵ Exod. 21:30; Num. 35:31, 32; Jer. 15:21; Lam. 3:58; Dan. 6:28; Sir. 51:2, 3; Num. 3:12, 46, 48, 49, 51 (Levites taken in place of first-born sons); Exod. 13:13-15; 34:20; Num. 18:15, 17 (ransoming of first-born sons); Lev. 27:13, 33 (ransom of animal sacrifice by monetary substitute); Pss. 49:7-8, 15; 71:23; 103:4; Hos. 13:14 (deliverance from Sheol).

⁴⁶ Examples of this tendency to overlook the clear Old Testament links between "ransom" terminology and deliverance from exile abound. To note a few: Robert Gundry's brief list of ransom texts in the Old Testament not only presents a strong contrast with his usually exhaustive catalogues of biblical parallels, but his concluding remark regarding them is revealing: "The OT passages do not help interpret Mark 10:45" (Gundry, *Mark*, 591). He then moves immediately into a discussion of Isaiah 53. Perhaps even more striking are the comments of Morna Hooker, who actually recognizes that the Old Testament repeatedly "link[s] the notion of redemption with God's saving action in bringing his people up from slavery in Egypt" and even calls it "a common theme in passages where the verb λυτρόω is used" (Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 248-49). However, she makes no attempt to use this "common" Old Testament theme in her actual exegesis of Mark 10:45, but is deterred, yet again, by the debate over Isaiah. Finally, Barnabas Lindars recognizes that the "ransom" terminology evokes "the Old Testament idea of redemption from slavery," but feels no compunction to apply this meaning to Mark 10:45 and instead rejects the passage as necessarily "later than the time of Jesus, because the idea of self-sacrifice is distinctively Greek" (Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1983], 77-78). But the text does not use the terminology of "self-sacrifice"—it uses the terminology of "ransom." He need only have examined the Old Testament prophets to find that the expectation that Israel would be "ransomed" from exile is anything but "distinctively Greek."

future deliverance from exile in the new exodus, the ingathering of the scattered tribes from among the nations.⁴⁷

As for the first exodus, there are several striking texts that use the language of “ransom” (often translated as “redeem”) to signify release from exile:

[God said to Moses:]⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and *I will ransom you*⁴⁸ with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment,⁷ and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.⁸ *And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.*”

(Exod. 6:6-8)⁴⁹

⁴² [Israel] did not keep in mind [the LORD’s] power,
or the day when he *ransomed*⁵⁰ them from the foe;

⁴³ when he wrought his signs in Egypt,
and his miracles in the fields of Zoan.

⁴⁴ He turned their rivers to blood, so that they could not
drink of their streams . . .

⁴⁹ He let loose on them his fierce anger, wrath, indignation,
and distress, a company of destroying angels . . .

⁵¹ He smote all the first-born in Egypt,
the first issue of their strength in the tents of Ham.

⁵² Then he led forth his people like sheep,

⁴⁷ The major exception to this is of course Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45,” 141, and *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, 270-84. Remarkably, even N. T. Wright, who is otherwise very adept at spotting themes that run throughout the Old Testament prophets, does not draw this connection.

⁴⁸ וְאֶתְּלִיתִי אֶחְבֹּם in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) LXX λυτρώσομαι ὑμᾶς in the Septuagint translation (LXX).

⁴⁹ All translations are from the RSV, with the more traditional translation of “redeem” sometimes being changed to “ransom” in order to properly highlight the biblical echoes present in the λύτρον terminology of Mark 10:45.

⁵⁰ MT פָּדָה LXX ἐλυτρώσατο.

and guided them in the wilderness like a flock . . .

(Ps. 78:42-55)

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and *ransomed you*⁵¹ from the house of bondage;
and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

(Mic. 6:4)

These are by no means the only examples of the connection between “ransom” terminology and return from exile. Indeed, it is striking just how many times “ransom” or “redemption” terminology is used in the Old Testament to describe the release from slavery and exile that took place in the exodus from Egypt.⁵²

In light of such an abundance of occurrences, it should come as no surprise that “ransom” terminology would come to play a key role in prophecies of the new exodus, when the scattered tribes of Israel would be restored from among the nations. These occurrences, it is important to note, are present in some of the most prominent oracles in the prophetic corpus.

For example, in Isaiah 43,⁵³ the “ransom” of Israel is directly connected to the people being gathered from “east,” “west,” “north,” and “south,” and their going through a “baptism” of fire and water:

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
*“Fear not, for I have ransomed you”*⁵⁴

⁵¹ MT פָּדִיָהֶם LXX ἐλυτρώσαμήν σε.

⁵² See also Exod. 15:13, 16; Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18; 2 Sam. 7:23; 1 Chron. 17:21; Neh. 1:10; Esther 4:17 (LXX only); 1 Macc. 4:11; Pss. 74:2; 77:15; 106:10; 136:24; Isa. 51:10-11; 63:9. Again, while different Hebrew terms such as נָצַל and פָּדָה lie behind various occurrences of λυτρόω terminology in the LXX, the basically synonymous nature of these two terms should be clear; see esp. Isa. 51:10-11.

⁵³ While there is simply not enough space in a brief essay such as this to cite the texts in their entirety, the reader is strongly encouraged to consult the entire chapter for each example in order to witness the full force of the parallels.

I have called you by name, you are mine.
 When you pass through the waters I will be with you;
 and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
 when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
 and the flame shall not consume you . . .

(Isa. 43:1-2)

This ingathering of the exiles from among the nations is directly tied to the “new thing” the Lord is doing: namely, the new exodus (see Isa. 43:18-19).⁵⁵ In similar fashion, Isaiah 52 links the ransom of Jerusalem with the “good news” of the Lord reigning in Zion and, again, a new exodus in which Israel will come back from the nations, but not in haste, as in the first exodus:

Shake yourself from the dust, arise, O captive Jerusalem;
 loose the bonds from your neck,
 O captive daughter of Zion.
 For thus says the LORD: “You were sold for nothing,
 and you *shall be ransomed*⁵⁶ without money . . .”

(Isa. 52:2-3)

In Jeremiah 31, the famous chapter regarding the “new covenant” that will exceed the covenant made during the first exodus, the “ransom” of Jacob comes about when the “remnant of Israel” is brought in from the ends of the earth as a “great company” and gathered like a scattered flock:

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
 and declare it in the coastlands afar off;
 say, “*He who scattered Israel will gather him,*

⁵⁴ MT יִלְכֹּךְ לִXX ἐλυτρώσαμην σε.

⁵⁵ While I count Isaiah 43 among the many texts that connect “ransom” terminology with the New Exodus, I do not agree with the hypothesis that it is Isa. 43:1-4 rather than chapters 52-53 that is the principle Isaianic background to Jesus’ statements in Mark 10:45. See Hampel, *Menschensohn und Historischer Jesus*, 326-333 and Stuhlmacher, “Vicariously Giving His Life for Many,” 23-25. For strong critiques, see Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45,” 144-46, and Gundry, *Mark*, 592.

⁵⁶ MT יִלְכֹּךְ לִXX λυτρωθήσεσθε.

and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.”
*For the LORD has ransomed*⁵⁷ *Jacob,*
he has redeemed him from hands to strong for him.
 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion.

(Jer. 31:10-12)

In language very similar to that found in Jeremiah, Micah 4 conjoins the ingathering of the Gentiles to Zion with the time in “the latter days” when the Lord will “ransom” the scattered remnant of Israel. In this text, however, we find in striking fashion not only the language of redemption and ingathering, but of the “coming” of the “kingdom” of God:

It shall come to pass in the latter days
 that the mountain of the house of the LORD
 shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
 and shall be raised up above the hills;
 and peoples shall flow to it
 and many nations shall come . . .
 And you, O tower of the flock,
 hill of the daughter of Zion,
to you it shall come,
 the former dominion shall come,
the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem . . .
 for now you shall go forth from the city
 and dwell in the open country;
 you shall go to Babylon.
There you shall be rescued,
*there the LORD will ransom you*⁵⁸
from the hand of your enemies.

(Mic 4:1-2, 8, 10)

Finally, Zechariah 10 describes the return of the “house of Judah” (the Jews deported to Babylon) and the “house of Joseph” (the ten northern tribes of Israel)—hence, all twelve tribes—as their being “ransomed” and gathered in from among the Gentiles in what is clearly a new exodus. He even forecasts that this future ingathering will be preceded by a time of tribulation—which he quite strikingly compares to the first passage through the Red Sea:

I will signal for them and gather them in,
*for I have ransomed them,*⁵⁹
 _____ *and they shall be as many as of old.*

⁵⁷ MT מִצִּיּוֹן LXX ἐλυτρώσατο.

⁵⁸ MT תִּצִּלֶנָּה LXX λυτρώσεται σε.

Though I scattered them among the nations,
yet in far countries they shall remember me,
and with their children they shall live and return.
I will bring them home from the land of Egypt,
and gather them from Assyria;
and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and Lebanon,
till there is no room for them.
They shall pass through the distress of Egypt,
and the waves of the sea shall be smitten,
and all the depths of the Nile dried up.

(Zech 10:8-11)⁶⁰

Redemption as the Restoration of All Israel

From this brief catalogue it should be clear that when Jesus speaks of the Son of Man giving his life as a “ransom,” the first thing that would come to mind of an ancient Jewish audience is not simple “atonement” for sins, but rather the *redemption of all Israel from Exile*. This would be specially true if he were to conjoin such terminology with the imagery of *passing through water*. This, of course, is exactly what he does when he speaks of his “baptism” in Mark 10:38. Such imagery would be evocative—as we see in the prophets—of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt via its passage through the Red Sea (see Isa 43:2; Zech 10:11).⁶¹

And, if any question should remain regarding whether “ransom” terminology alone could evoke such a widespread hope, I would submit that when the language of “ransom” is combined with the words “for many,” as it is in Mark 10:45, little room for doubt is left. The reason: the language and imagery of “many” is also used in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism to evoke the hope for the new exodus, the end of the exile, and the restoration of all Israel.

In the Old Testament, the image of “many” or of a multitude being brought back from exile is notably present in texts which look forward to the restoration of the twelve tribes. Remarkably, this imagery is probably rooted in the first Exodus itself. For the slavery from which Israel was “ransomed” (Exod. 6:6-8) began when they became too “many” (Exod. 1:9), so that they left Egypt as a “multitude”⁶² (Exod. 12:38-39).

⁵⁹ MT פְּרִי־הַיָּם LXX λυτρώσονται αὐτούς.

⁶⁰ These texts by no means exhaust the use of “ransom” terminology to describe the end of the exile and the ingathering of scattered Israel from among the nations. See further: Isa. 44:21-23; 51:11; 62:12; Jer. 50:33-34; Lam. 5:8; cf. 4:22; Hos. 13:14; cf. 13:4-5, 14:7; Zeph. 3:15 (LXX); cf. 3:19-20; Zech. 3:1 (LXX).

⁶¹ This suggested connection with the Exodus is even stronger if the imagery of the “cup” of suffering can be tied to the sufferings of the Passover trials, as it is, for example in Mark 14. For further discussion, see Pitre, “The Historical Jesus, the Great Tribulation, and the End of the Exile,” 623-30.

This initial link between the “ransom” of “many” and the Passover and exodus continues in Old Testament prophecies of the new exodus. Perhaps the most direct parallel to Jesus’ words in Mark 10:45 is Zechariah’s prophecy that those whom the Lord “shall ransom”⁶³ from exile shall be “as many”⁶⁴ as of old—that is, as many as in the days of the first exodus (Zech. 10:8). Also noteworthy is Jeremiah’s comparison of “Jacob,” whom the Lord has “ransomed,”⁶⁵ with a “great company”⁶⁶ who will be brought back to the land from “the farthest parts of the earth” (Jer. 31:8, 11).

Hosea likewise declares that when “the people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together”—that is, when all twelve tribes are gathered—“the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered” (Hos. 1:10-11). Even in Isaiah, it is none other than the scattered exiles of Israel who are the “many” astonished at the Servant (Isa. 52:14). They are the “many”⁶⁷ who will be “accounted righteous” because of his death (Isa. 53:11); they are the “many”⁶⁸ whose “sin” he will bear (Isa. 53:12).⁶⁹

But perhaps the most intriguing use of the language of “many” comes to us from Daniel, where the word is used repeatedly to describe the righteous remnant who undergoes *the eschatological tribulation*. It is these “many”⁷⁰ who will make a covenant with the messianic prince during the tribulation (Dan. 9:27),⁷¹ and be persecuted during the last days (Dan. 11:33, 34, 39). It is the “many,” as Gabriel tells Daniel, who “shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined” in the sufferings

⁶² MT רב LXX πολὺς.

⁶³ MT פְּדִי־יָחִים LXX λυτρώσομαι.

⁶⁴ MT רבו LXX πολλοί.

⁶⁵ MT פֶּדָה LXX ἐλυτρώσατο.

⁶⁶ MT קָהַל גְּדוֹלָה LXX ὄχλον πολύν.

⁶⁷ MT רַבִּים LXX πολλοῖς.

⁶⁸ MT רַבִּים LXX πολλούς.

⁶⁹ It is not clear to me whether the “many nations” described in Isa. 52:15 should be considered part of this group.

⁷⁰ MT רַבִּים LXX πολλούς.

of the last days (Dan. 12:10). Most importantly, it is also these “many” who, after suffering the tribulation, shall ultimately be raised from the dead:

And there shall be a time of tribulation such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And *many* of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and *those who make righteous the many*,⁷² like stars for ever and ever. . . .

(Dan. 12:1-3)⁷³

Like all “resurrection” texts in the Old Testament, this text is also a prophecy of the *restoration of Israel from exile*. This connection between resurrection and the restoration of Israel finds its classic expression in Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones, in which bodily resurrection signals the return of the twelve tribes of Israel, the coming of the Davidic Messiah, and the end of the exile (see Ezek. 37).⁷⁴

The end of the exile is also implicitly in view in Daniel. For when Daniel asks Gabriel when the resurrection of “the many” is to take place, the angel answers by referring him back to both the tribulation in Daniel 7 (“a time, two times, and half a time,” Dan. 12:7; cf. 7:25) and the tribulation in Daniel 9 (the “abomination of desolation,” Dan. 12:11; cf. 9:27). As we saw above, this tribulation represents the climax of Israel’s exilic suffering. Hence, “the many” in Daniel are those Israelites who, after enduring the tribulation that will accompany the coming of the “Son of Man,” will be made righteous when the exile comes to its end at the resurrection of the dead.⁷⁵

The case for these links between the “many,” the exile, and the

⁷¹ The same terminology is employed throughout Daniel in both the MT and the LXX; I will not repeat it here for the sake of clarity.

⁷² MT מְרַבִּים LXX τῶν πολλῶν.

⁷³ RSV, slightly modified.

⁷⁴ Similar connections between restoration and resurrection are present in Isaiah 26-27 and Hosea 5-6. For a full-scale treatment of the resurrection which recognizes its connection to the restoration of Israel, see esp. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 108-128.

restoration of Israel, can be clinched by studying use of the image in the Second Temple period. *The Similitudes of Enoch* depicts the end of the exile as "a whole array" of chariots loaded with people coming "from the east and from the west" to worship the Lord of the Spirits (1 En. 57:1). Even more remarkable, the author of the Qumran text, *1Q Rule of the Community*, who most certainly identified his fellow covenanters with the Israelite exiles (see 1QS 8:12-14, 9:18-20), repeatedly speaks of the community in precisely the same terminology as Daniel: they are "the Many" (הַרְבֵּי).⁷⁶ Finally, perhaps the most striking parallels can be found in 4 Ezra and Josephus, both of whom use the image of a *multitude* to describe the lost ten tribes of Israel:

And as for your seeing him [the Son of Man, the Messiah] gather to himself *another multitude* (*aliam multitudinem* in the Latin) that was peaceable, *these are the ten tribes* which were led away from their own land into captivity in the days of King Hoshea, whom Shalmaneser the king of the Assyrians led captive. . . .

(4 Ezra 13:39-40)⁷⁷

The entire body of Israel remained in that country; wherefore there are but two tribes in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans, while *the ten tribes* are beyond Euphrates until now, and are an *immense multitude*, and not to be estimated by numbers.

(*Antiquities of the Jews* II.133)⁷⁸

These texts clearly show that the ancient hope for the restoration of *all* Israel—including the lost ten tribes—from the time of Daniel to the time of 4 Ezra, was often expressed by means of the image of "the many" or a "multitude." This is easily explained: for it was the *greater part* of Israel,

⁷⁵ See also Marvin C. Pate and Douglas W. Kennard, *Deliverance Now and Not Yet: The New Testament and the Great Tribulation*, Studies in Biblical Literature, 54 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 39-41. It should be noted here that some have seen in this language of "the many" in Dan 12:3 an allusion to the "many" who are justified by the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Cf. Collins, *Daniel*, 385. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 589, n. 190, also picks up on this, and uses it to strengthen his contention that Jesus has Isaiah 40-55 in mind in both his words and deeds.

⁷⁶ The term occurs some 27 times in 1QS 6-9. See Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "Exile and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in ed. James M. Scott, *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 112-25 (esp. 122).

⁷⁷ Trans. Bruce Metzger, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985).

⁷⁸ William Whiston, trans., *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987).

ten of the twelve tribes, who had been scattered to the four winds by Assyria and remained in exile even unto Josephus' day.

The upshot of all this is simple: Jesus' words about a "ransom" for "many" in Mark 10:45 are directly evocative of the exodus, the exile, and the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel. To one steeped in the promises of the Israelite prophets or informed by early Jewish eschatology, any prophet speaking of the Son of Man giving his life as "a ransom for many" would call to mind one thing: the still unfulfilled promise of the Lord to "atone for iniquity" and to ransom the lost ten tribes from among the nations, bringing them home to the promised land in a new exodus.

The New Exodus, the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Suffering Servant

It is this link between the New Exodus and atonement for sin that finally brings us back to the issue around which so much scholarly debate on Mark 10:45 has revolved: the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. While we certainly do not have the space to enter into the debate in any detail, our distinctive focus on the Old Testament background of the death of the Messiah, the atoning tribulation, and the restoration of Israel, may lend indirect support to the position that Jesus is in fact drawing on the Isaianic servant figure in "the ransom saying." The reason: in Isaiah, the figure of the Servant, like that of the messianic Son of Man, is not only tied to atonement for sin; he also inaugurates a *new exodus* and *the restoration of the tribes of Israel*. Given everything we have seen so far, reread these two key texts regarding the servant:

And now the LORD says,
 who formed me from the womb to be *his servant*,
 to bring Jacob back to him,
 and that Israel might be gathered to him. . . .
 "It is too light a thing *that you should be my servant*
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
 I will give you as a light to the nations,
 that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

(Isa. 49:5-6)

Surely he has borne our griefs
 and carried our sorrows;
 yet we esteemed him stricken,
 smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions,
 he was bruised for our iniquities;
 upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
 and with his stripes we are healed. . . .
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way,
 and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . .
 He poured out his soul to death,
 and was number with the transgressors,
 yet *he bore the sin of many,*
 and made intercession for transgressors.

(Isa. 53:4-6, 12)

The juxtaposition of these two texts should make quite clear: the servant of Isaiah takes upon himself the iniquities and sins of exiled Israel—the “many” scattered “sheep” who have “gone astray”—in order to “raise up the tribe of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel.” That is, he makes his life an “offering for sin”—the sin of Israel that led to its exile, in order to bring about the restoration of all Israel in a new exodus. Moreover, this new exodus, unlike the first, will somehow be universal in scope, for it will include the ingathering not only of Israel, but of the Gentile nations (see Isa. 66).⁷⁹

In short, Jesus’ 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 and the restoration of Israel. In both, the exile is only brought to an end by a climactic period of tribulation or affliction in which a key figure, the Messiah/Son of Man, or the servant, dies, and thereby atones for the sins of Israel that have led her into exile in the first place.

Indeed, in light of this exegesis, all of Mark 10:35-45 makes a great deal of sense. James and John, presupposing the messianic identity of Jesus, make a request to sit at his right and left hand in the glory of his kingdom. Jesus responds with a question: are they able to drink the cup of tribulation and be baptized in the waters of suffering which he as (Danielic)

⁷⁹ Many other texts in Isaiah 40-55 point to the important connections between the forgiveness of sins and the end of the exile. For example, when Israel’s “iniquity” is forgiven, a new exodus will occur (Isa. 42:1-5). When the Lord blots out Israel’s “transgressions” and does not “remember” its “sins,” they will be “ransomed” and gathered “from the end of the earth” (Isa. 43:1-28). When Jacob’s “transgressions” are swept away “like a cloud,” and they are “ransomed,” they will return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city (Isa. 44:21-28). Israel was sold into exile because of its “iniquities” and “transgressions,” when they are “ransomed,” the Lord will dry up the sea to clear a path for their return (Isa. 50:1-3). See also Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 268-74.

Messiah will have to undergo? Their answer, in the affirmative, not only leads Jesus to explain that it is not his place to grant them places of authority, but also to emphasize that in the (again Danielic) eschatological “kingdom,” the Son of Man will not lord it over his subjects like the Gentile tyrants but rather will suffer and die for them as a “servant.” As both the Servant of Isaiah and the Messiah of Daniel, the Son of Man will suffer and die at the climax of Israel’s exile, and will thereby effect an atonement for sin (the “ransom”) for the scattered multitude of the lost sheep of the house of Israel (the “many”). In so doing, his death, along with the other sufferings of the time of trial, will bring about the end of the exile.

This, I would humbly suggest, is the solution to the notorious crux of Mark 10:45. This is its most plausible interpretation. Jesus is saying that the Son of Man as Messiah will perish in the tribulation, the climax of the exile, and that his life will function as a “ransom” for the “many” who have been scattered. His death will atone for sin and will restore the tribes of Jacob and raise up the survivors of Israel, bringing them back to Zion in the long-awaited return from exile, the new exodus.

Conclusions and Implications

The implications of the interpretation offered herein have a potentially significant impact on our understanding of the text at the levels of exegesis, history, and theology. By way of conclusion, I will briefly note some of these.

First, at the level of exegesis, the link between the ransom for many and the restoration of Israel from exile allows us to provide a solution to a famous *crux interpretum*. As noted above, despite the intense focus which has been paid this text, it continues to present serious difficulties to modern exegetes and to leave many questions unanswered. In particular, the questions of “Who are the many?” and “From what are they ransomed?”—which continue to baffle exegetes—can now be answered quite clearly: the many are the scattered tribes, the exiles of Israel, who are to be ransomed from among the Gentile nations.⁸⁰ The strength of this solution lies not only in its clarity, but also in the fact that it employs the language and imagery of the Old Testament itself, and not just a single text, but a host of texts which converge around the central Old Testament hope for the new exodus and the restoration Israel from

⁸⁰ Contrast this specificity with the vagueness and difficulty present in the proffered answer cited in the footnote above.

among the Gentiles.

Second, at the level of history, this interpretation raises serious questions about the widespread scholarly doubt that the "ransom saying" originated with the historical Jesus. While we did not have the space to properly engage this question in this essay, I have taken it up elsewhere in some detail.⁸¹ Here I would simply point out a curious paradox in Jesus research: namely, although recent historical Jesus scholarship has produced a veritable flood of literature placing Jesus quite squarely in the context of *early Jewish restoration eschatology*, it has at the same time either totally *ignored* Mark 10:45 or declared it inauthentic (the former often functioning as a tacit approval of the latter).⁸²

For example, E. P. Sanders, perhaps the foremost proponent of Jesus as a prophet of restoration eschatology, dismisses the suggestion that Jesus could have intended his death to have sacrificial and redemptive efficacy as "weird."⁸³ As we have seen in this exploration, nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, the "ransom saying" is remarkably congruent with the Old Testament hope for the restoration of Israel and fits quite squarely into the reconstruction of Jesus a Jewish eschatological prophet. In light of this fact, I would challenge Jesus researchers to take up the important question of its authenticity anew and fill the gaping scholarly hole surrounding a saying which could tell us a great deal about how the prophet from Nazareth might have understood his own mission to Israel.

Third and finally, at the level of theology, the link between the ransom saying and the restoration of Israel has the potential to open new doors in contemporary discussion of soteriology in general and the doctrine of the atonement in particular. It is widely known that the towering figure of St. Anselm and his influential formulation of the theory of substitutionary atonement in *Cur Deus Homo* has been strongly criticized for some time; yet many questions remain regarding how to understand this most central of Christian doctrines.⁸⁴

In light of this situation, what may be needed now is a fresh reformulation of the discussion, one which draws directly on biblical

⁸¹ See Pitre, "The Historical Jesus, the Great Tribulation, and the End of the Exile," 534-83.

⁸² For references, see Pitre, "The Historical Jesus, the Great Tribulation, and the End of the Exile," 536.

⁸³ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 333.

language and imagery, so that the “sacred page” might truly be “the soul of sacred theology.”⁸⁵ This study has used the biblical concepts of the eschatological tribulation, the exile and restoration of Israel, and the new exodus, to throw new light on Jesus’ concept of his atoning death. My hope is that theologians interested in this fundamental soteriological issue might also find these biblical categories helpful and illuminating for future discussion and reflection.

⁸⁴ For recent surveys with bibliography, see esp. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), and Michael Winter, *The Atonement* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995). See also Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Herbert (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

⁸⁵ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965), 24.