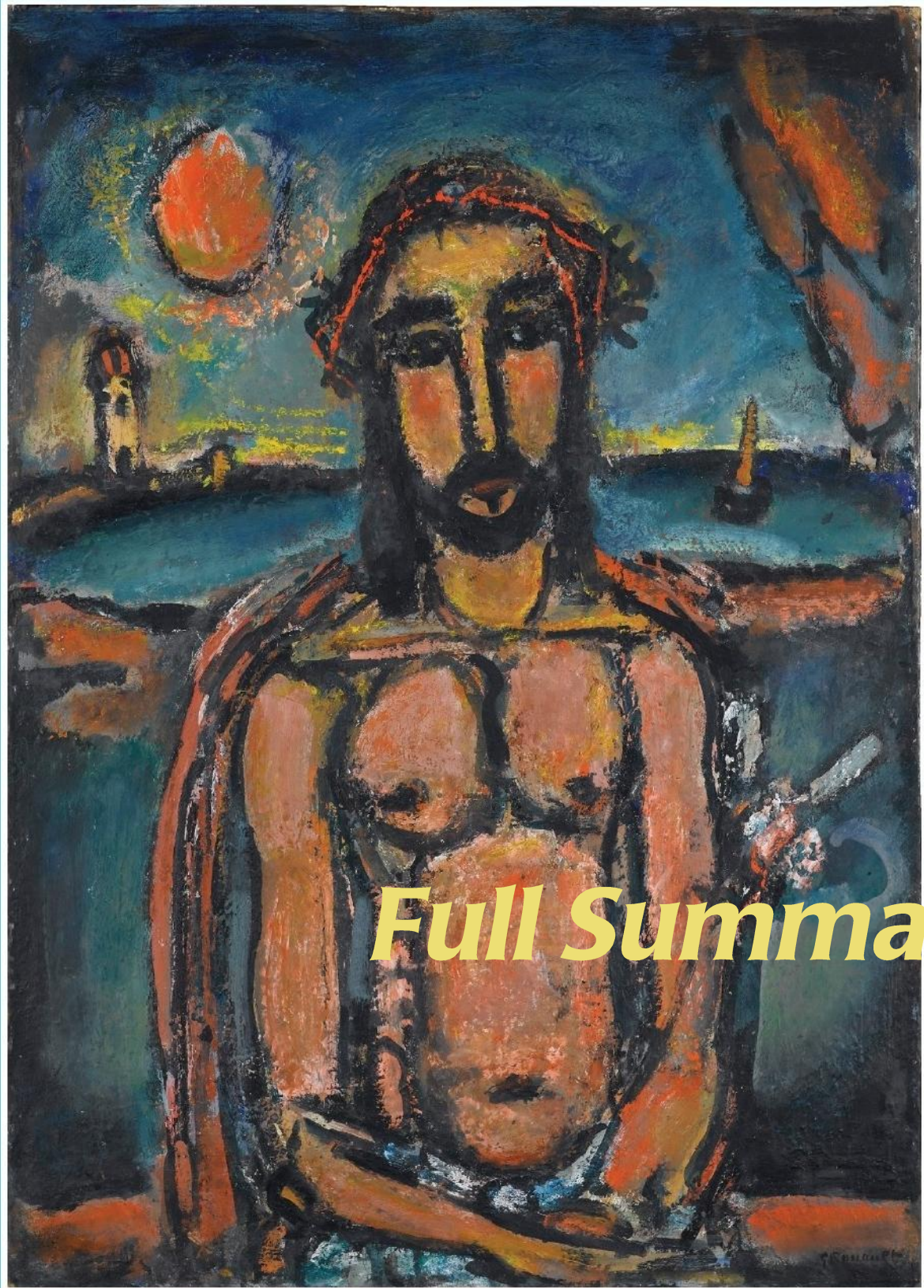


Jesus' Death in New Testament Thought

VOLUME 1: BACKGROUND



Full Summary

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2018

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Introduction

The same affirmations with which I began my book *Paul on the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006) apply to the New Testament as a whole:

For Paul, Jesus' death did not save anyone or reconcile anyone to God; it did not have "redemptive effects." According to his letters, while Paul regarded Jesus' death as sacrificial, he did not teach that it expiated sins, propitiated God, or exhausted God's wrath at sin, or that human sin was judged, taken away, or atoned for on the cross. Nor did Paul maintain that Jesus' death liberated humanity from sin, death, the devil, or the power of evil. Paul did not regard Jesus as a corporate or representative figure who summed up or included others, so that what was true of him was thereby true of them as well. Nor did he believe that Jesus had died as humanity's substitute or representative, or in order to make it possible for God to forgive sins while remaining righteous. Jesus' death, for Paul, was not the basis upon which people were justified or their sins forgiven; neither was it some type of cosmic event that put an end to the world as it was and ushered in a new age. Our sinful humanity was not destroyed, put to death, renewed or transformed when Jesus was crucified. In Paul's thought, Jesus did not die for the purpose of setting an example for others to follow; revealing some truth about God, humanity, or the world; enabling people to participate in his death and resurrection; or providing them with a means of transfer from this age into the new one. Believers are not saved by trusting in the efficacy of Christ's death for their salvation (p. x).

The intention of that passage from my book was to call into question all of the traditional readings of the Pauline and New Testament passages that ascribe saving significance to Jesus' death from the time of Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century CE to the present, including those of the church fathers, Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, the sixteenth-century Reformers, the theologians of Protestant orthodoxy, the liberal theologians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, major twentieth-century figures such as Albert Schweitzer, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann, and contemporary New Testament scholars such as E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, and N. T. Wright. I argue that the primary ideas and presuppositions on which all of these traditional and contemporary readings of Paul and the New Testament are based are foreign to the thought world of the authors of the New Testament writings and have wrongly been read back into the New Testament passages that relate Jesus' death to human salvation.

This work, however, is primarily an attempt to offer an alternative reading of the New Testament texts. Its purpose is *constructive* rather than *deconstructive*. It aims to offer a credible and convincing historical reconstruction of the beliefs of Jesus' first followers regarding the salvific significance of his death as these are reflected in the New Testament.

Chapter 1: Jesus' Death in Traditional Christian Thought

The New Testament writings consistently refer to Jesus' death by means of brief, enigmatic formulas (see, for example, Matt. 26:28; Mark 10:45; Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:24-25; 4:24-25; 5:6-11; 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:14-

15; Gal. 1:4; 2:19-21; 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 2:13-16; 5:2; Col. 1:13-14, 19-22; 1 Thess. 5:9-10; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 1:4; 9:11-14, 26-28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:24-25; 1 John 1:7–2:2; 4:10; Rev. 1:5; 5:9). These formulaic allusions have all been interpreted on the basis of ideas that date back to the time of Irenaeus. Three categories of interpretations exist:

1. Forensic/Penal Substitution;
2. Physical/Ontological Participation;
3. Ethical/Revelational.

Each of these interpretations is based on certain presuppositions:

1. Forensic/Penal Substitution: God's justice must be satisfied before God can remit sins. Only the sacrificial death of Christ could accomplish this satisfaction. Christ had to be sinless, fully divine yet fully human, in order to make atonement for human sin. The objective of Christ's coming was his sacrificial, substitutionary death. Although human beings have been saved objectively, they must still receive that salvation subjectively through faith.

2. Physical/Ontological Participation: Powers such as sin and death are ontological in nature and as such can be dealt with in much the same way that ontological realities or substances are dealt with in the physical world ("absorbed," "neutralized," or "exhausted" through some type of "mechanics"). Christ's death "works" to "effect" a transformation of sinful humanity or creation by virtue of the mystical or ontological solidarity between Christ and others. Before the ontological transformation of human beings, human nature, or the created order could take place, these realities first had to be transformed in Christ himself through his incarnation, death, and resurrection. These

events make it possible for human beings and creation as a whole to "participate" in the transformation effected first in Christ. While that transformation is already an objective reality, it must still be subjectively appropriated. These ideas were clear and easily comprehensible in the first century, but are no longer so today.

3. Ethical/revelational: Christ's death was necessary to bring about in human beings the ethical transformation God desired to see in them. What was revealed to human beings by Christ's death could have been revealed by God in no other way.

Scholars today generally combine these views when interpreting the New Testament texts that allude to Jesus' death, though their thought on these questions often lacks clarity and reflects confusions and ambiguities.

Chapter 2:

Second-Temple Jewish Soteriology

The objective in this and the following two chapters is to reconstruct second-temple Jewish beliefs regarding salvation, atonement, and vicarious death. Questions regarding the "original meaning" of passages from the Hebrew Scriptures are not relevant to this reconstruction and thus are not discussed. Instead, the focus is on second-temple Jewish literature and the way in which ideas from the Hebrew Scriptures were being interpreted in the second-temple period.

This chapter looks not only at second-temple Jewish soteriological beliefs, but above all the *logic* behind those beliefs, as well as the views of Israel's God found in the Hebrew Scriptures and second-temple Jewish literature. Among the Jewish beliefs considered are those concerning the election of Israel; the

Mosaic law's purpose and goodness as a means to promote justice and *shalom*; the common understandings of divine reward and punishment; views on justification and righteousness; eschatological hopes and expectations; and Jewish attitudes toward Rome and the Jerusalem hierarchy. This discussion provides the background necessary to consider the questions regarding sin, atonement, and vicarious death addressed in the following two chapters.

Chapter 3: Sacrifice and Atonement in Second-Temple Jewish Thought

Biblical scholars commonly attribute to Jews in antiquity the following ideas regarding sacrifice: sacrifices made atonement for sin; sacrifices "effected" expiation and purification from sin; sacrifices propitiated God's wrath and were necessary for God to remit sins; the idea central to Jewish sacrificial thought was that of substitution, participation, or representation; sacrifice revealed the "scapegoat mechanism" inherent to it (Girard).

This chapter develops an alternative reconstruction of second-temple Jewish thought regarding sacrifice. Sacrifices were viewed essentially as gifts and offerings presented to God that embodied petitions and prayers to God. What made sacrifices and prayers acceptable to God was the inner disposition and commitment to God's will of those offering them or of those on whose behalf they were offered.

When we grasp the logic underlying ancient Jewish sacrificial beliefs and practices, as well as the views of Israel's God associated with those beliefs and practices, we see that many of the ideas that scholars ascribe to first-century Jews are in reality foreign to second-

temple Jewish thought. For Jewish people in antiquity, it was not sacrifices that made atonement for sin, but the *(re)commitment to God's will* that those sacrifices expressed and embodied; this alone was thought to obtain God's forgiveness and put away God's wrath. The notion that sacrifices "worked" to make expiation or purification is contrary to the view of God prevalent in second-temple Judaism, as is the idea that sacrifices were necessary in order to make atonement and obtain divine forgiveness. Sacrifice was not believed to revolve around the ideas of substitution or participation, nor was it about "scapegoating" or "sacred violence."

Chapter 4: Vicarious Suffering and Death in Ancient Jewish Thought

Biblical scholars have commonly claimed that, in ancient Judaism, certain passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and second-temple Jewish literature were interpreted in the sense that suffering and death could make atonement for sins. A close examination of Isaiah 53 reveals nothing that would have led first-century Jews to interpret that passage in terms of penal substitution. Instead, they would have understood it in terms of God's servant enduring suffering and death as divine chastisement in ways that he did not deserve as a result of his efforts to bring others back into conformity with God's will—a task in which he was successful, at least in part. It was in this way that the servant would have been seen as obtaining forgiveness and healing for the people.

The idea that suffering and death could make atonement, obtain divine forgiveness, or propitiate God's wrath is found neither in the Hebrew Scriptures nor second-temple Jewish literature. While some of these ideas are found

in Greco-Roman literature, they represent a view of God that would have been foreign to ancient Jewish thought. In both 2 and 4 Maccabees, what turns away God's wrath and obtains divine forgiveness is not the vicarious suffering and death of the "martyrs" mentioned there, but the return to God that their faithfulness to the law brings about in others. The notion that suffering and death in themselves could atone for sins is absent from ancient rabbinic thought as well.

Throughout all of these writings, then, it is never suffering and death that make atonement, obtain divine forgiveness, or turn away God's wrath, but only a (re)commitment to living in conformity with God's will.

Chapter 5: Jesus' Death in the Context of His Ministry

In order to understand the salvific significance ascribed to Jesus' death by his first followers, we must begin by examining the ministry of Jesus. His life and death were viewed against the background of his commitment to the well-being of others. This commitment led Jesus to dedicate himself to bringing healing to others and instructing people in God's will for justice and wholeness. His proclamation of God's reign constituted a critique of the social, political, economic, and religious system of his time and the God associated with it. Through his teaching regarding the need to trust fully in the God whom he called "Father," he sought to free others from the fear which that system had instilled in people in its attempt to keep them in subjection to it.

However, Jesus also sought to form around himself an alternative community of followers that would manifest his same commitment to justice and the well-being of all, not only by serving others as Jesus did, but also by rejecting and resisting the values, norms, and practices of his day that he considered oppressive, including those associated with many traditional interpretations of the Mosaic law. This involved defining God's will in ways that set him at odds with those who represented the status quo.

Jesus' dedication to this alternative system—the "reign of God"—generated such conflict with those in positions of authority that eventually he found himself in a situation in which he had to choose either to desist from his work on behalf of others or else to continue in it and as a result suffer the dire consequences, including above all that of a violent death. Jesus chose the latter, not only because he refused to back down from his activity on behalf of the salvation of others, but also because it was the only way in which he could hope to achieve his objective of establishing the alternative community that would continue to be committed to his same vision of God's reign.

If Jesus ascribed any salvific significance to his death, he must have seen it as being "for others" in the sense that it would enable and empower those within his community of followers to remain committed to his same vision and mission, trusting fully in the God of justice that he had proclaimed—the same God in whose name he had been willing to give up his life. According to Jesus' teaching, those who formed part of that community could be assured of God's approval, acceptance, and forgiveness.

Chapter 6: The Crucified Jesus as Lord and Mediator

In this chapter and the following four, I look at the New Testament as a whole to reconstruct the basic beliefs that appear to be common throughout most of these writings. This involves applying the criterion of multiple attestation to the New Testament material in general.

Central to New Testament thought is the claim that Jesus is Lord. This claim placed Jesus above all other authorities, including those associated with Rome and Jerusalem, and posited a unique relationship between Jesus and the God he called "Father." What particularly set Jesus apart from all earthly rulers, however, was the fact that he had truly sought to serve the interests of others in life and death. Ironically, the shameful and degrading way in which he had died was thought to make him superior to all other rulers and authorities, since it demonstrated the extent of his commitment to the well-being and salvation of all.

This interpretation of Jesus' death led to a counterimperial and countercultural way of understanding Jesus' lordship and the "slavery" of those who regarded themselves as belonging to Jesus. Jesus' first followers believed that he had died seeking to be exalted by God as Lord of all so that he might continue to serve others from a position of divine authority from heaven. They also proclaimed that, as a result of Jesus' faithfulness to the task God had given him of forming a community fully committed to living in conformity to God's will, God had raised Jesus and established him at his right hand so that he might consummate his work on behalf of the salvation of all those who would form part of that community. His death was thus

viewed in the context of all that he had sought for others in his ministry and in his last days in Jerusalem.

Because Jesus' lordship was diametrically opposed to the type of lordship that had and has prevailed throughout human history, it was not understood merely in terms of the replacement of one Lord or "kyriarchy" by another. The fact that both Jesus and the God he proclaimed were fully and truly committed to justice, equity, wholeness, and well-being for all meant that to submit to God and Jesus was to submit to true love, justice, and righteousness as God had redefined these things through Jesus.

Among the members of Jesus' community of followers, no person or group had the right to define unilaterally the will of God for others and on that basis to define how love, justice, and righteousness were to be understood and the form they were to take in each particular context; this could be done only through dialogue with others both within and outside of the community. Thus living under Jesus' lordship and identifying with the reign of God he proclaimed was paradoxically understood as a form of *slavery* that brought true *liberation*, since assuming the same commitment to living for others that Jesus had manifested in life and death freed one from other enslaving powers and beings in the world.

Jesus' first followers also understood Jesus as the unique mediator between God and others. This set him above others who were regarded as God's agents or representatives on earth, including the Roman emperor and the Jewish high priests. The idea that Jesus mediates access to God derives from the belief that it is Jesus who reveals and

defines God's will fully and definitively as God's Son.

In New Testament thought, the basis for Jesus' mediatorial activity for others is his God-given task of bringing others into conformity with God's will as members of the alternative community that lives under his lordship. Jesus' followers would have understood his death as an implicit petition to God on behalf of the salvation of others, and would have seen his death as salvific in that, by giving up his life seeking that salvation, he had obtained it, since it was certain to come through him now that God had responded to his faithfulness unto death by exalting him as Lord and servant over all.

Chapter 7: Jesus, God's Will, and the Law

The conviction that the crucified Jesus had been exalted as Lord and that salvation depended on living out of faith in him as the one who defined God's will led to tensions and conflicts in the early communities of Jesus' followers and in the Jewish communities where Jesus' followers were active. According to Jesus' followers, one's life and conduct were now to revolve around Jesus as Lord. This involved relegating the Mosaic law to a position of secondary importance. The obedience God now demanded was no longer simply to the law *per se* but to Jesus as the one who represented God as God's Son.

In this way, the law was displaced from its central position in the life of those Jews who confessed Jesus as Lord, though it continued to be of great importance for them. Throughout the New Testament, God's will is no longer defined by looking directly to the Mosaic law, but by looking to Jesus and his interpretation of the law. This redefinition of God's will also led to a different under-

standing regarding what was necessary in order to be judged righteous by God. The conflicts over justification and righteousness we find in the New Testament had nothing to do with whether obedience to God and good works done in accordance with justice, love, and mercy were necessary in order to be declared righteous and accepted by God. On that point, Jesus' followers were in full agreement with other Jews, maintaining together with them that *only God by pure grace* could bring about such a life in those who believed in him.

Instead, the question that was at the heart of the debates and conflicts among Jesus' first followers as well as other Jews with whom they were in dialogue had to do with *precisely how obedience to God's will was to be defined and understood*. Traditional Jewish thought equated obedience to God's will with a commitment to living in conformity with the Mosaic law as it had commonly come to be interpreted. However, Jesus' first followers came to define God's will in terms of submitting to Jesus as Lord and placed him *above* the law so that full obedience to God and that law was inseparable from obeying and following *Jesus*.

Faith and works were never put in opposition to one another in the way that this has happened in discussions among Christians since the time of the Protestant Reformation. What was at the center of the debate among Jesus' first followers and other Jews was the question of whether people were to look primarily to the *Mosaic law* to define God's will or alternatively to *Jesus* as the one whom God had designated Messiah, Lord, and eschatological judge of all. The distinction was therefore not between *faith and works*, but rather between following and obeying *Jesus*

and following and obeying the Mosaic law alone, independently of faith in Jesus as Lord.

These beliefs regarding Jesus and the law raised numerous questions and problems to which Jesus' first followers had to respond. What role was the law now to play in the life of believers? Why should they continue to observe the Mosaic law if what really mattered was living according to God's will as defined by Jesus? If one could set aside literal observance of certain commandments, why had God given those commandments in the first place? For Jesus' followers, offering convincing answers to these questions was an extremely difficult task.

Once righteousness was redefined in terms of living under Jesus' lordship rather than under the Mosaic law independently of Jesus, the door was opened for the inclusion of uncircumcised non-Jews in the community of Jesus' followers. This led to further tensions and conflicts. Inevitably, there would be distinctions among those in the community of believers in Christ who continued to observe the law in a traditional sense and those who did not. Each group would need to make concessions to the other. Jesus' first followers offered a variety of responses to the question of why God had given the law and how it was now to be observed in order to respond to Jewish objections to their understanding of Jesus and the gospel.

Chapter 8: Jesus' Death and the New Covenant Community

While originally Jesus' first followers believed themselves to be living under the same covenant God had made with Israel in antiquity, eventually they came to speak of a new covenant. They also saw themselves as constituting a new temple and at some point as a new community that was distinguishable from the Jewish community as a whole. Discussions arose as to who constituted the true Israel and who was actually living in conformity with God's law. From their perspective, their experience of the Holy Spirit and their practice of baptism set Jesus' followers apart from those Jews who did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus' first followers therefore affirmed that Jesus had lived and died in order to establish a new basis upon which the members of God's people might relate to God and one another. Nevertheless, the condition upon which people were believed to be forgiven and accepted by God was not Jesus' suffering, death, or blood per se, but their commitment to living according to God's will as defined through Jesus and his cross. When the first believers in Jesus claimed that he had died for them and that they had attained redemption, salvation, and forgiveness through his blood, they meant that Jesus' faithfulness unto death to the task given him had led to the new reality they now experienced as members of his community of followers and had laid the basis for the new relationship to God and others in which they now lived. Through Jesus, they now had access to God and God's forgiveness in a way in which they had previously *not* had.

Chapter 9: The Fulfillment of the Scriptures and the Divine Plan

In part as a response to the scandal of the cross, yet also due to messianic beliefs held by many Jews, Jesus' first followers began to affirm that the Scriptures had pointed to Jesus and found their fulfillment in him. Certain texts such as Isaiah 53 and many of the Psalms (2, 22, 110, 118) played an especially important role in the development of this claim. Paul's letters demonstrate that typological interpretations of the Scriptures arose fairly soon after Jesus' death (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 5:7; 10:1-11; Gal. 4:21-31). Other beliefs and practices of Jesus' followers were also seen as fulfilling typologically ideas and commandments found in the Hebrew Scriptures, such as the commandment regarding circumcision.

Rather than merely pointing to isolated texts as finding their fulfillment in Jesus and the new reality that had come to exist through him, Jesus' first followers claimed that the Scriptures as a whole spoke of a divine plan that had existed even before creation. This plan contemplated the history of Israel before Jesus' time, as well as Jesus' coming, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation as Lord. This plan was also thought to include the sending out of apostles such as Paul and the proclamation of the gospel to the nations throughout the world. The rejection of Jesus and his followers by many within Israel had also been foretold in the Scriptures, yet ironically this rejection was seen as making it possible for people from among the nations to be incorporated into the community of God's people. The end result would be the salvation of "all Israel." This was the "mystery" that Paul and others proclaimed.

When the New Testament speaks of Jesus' death as "necessary," this necessity has to do with the fulfillment of the divine plan as a whole. However, Jesus' death was regarded as necessary *not merely because it formed part of a divine plan conceived before the world's creation and foretold in the Scriptures, but also because only through Jesus' total commitment to God's will had it been possible to create a community of people who would share that same commitment in the same way.* This was thought to occur *by faith*, as people came to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and live under him in the alternative community established through his death. The fact that the one they followed and trusted in as Lord had been fully committed to loving and serving others in the way God desired meant that no one could truly form part of his community of followers unless they loved and served God and others in the same way.

The christological claims that developed among Jesus' first followers in the years immediately following his death arose out of their conviction that God had exalted him as Lord for all, as well as their interpretation of the Scriptures. They believed that the divine plan that God had conceived of before creation had revolved around Jesus as God's Son from the very beginning. These christological claims enabled them to stress Jesus' authority over other human authorities and over the Mosaic law. However, those claims also provided a basis for proclaiming that the God of Jesus was distinct from the God associated with the oppressive political, economic, and religious system imposed by Rome and Jerusalem.

Chapter 10: Jesus' Death for Others: The Story and the Formulas

Initially, the story told by Jesus' followers built on the same foundational story of Israel that appears in the Hebrew Scriptures, according to which God's people needed to be saved from their sinful ways. The belief in Jesus as God's Son and Lord, however, led Jesus' followers to affirm that this salvation was to come through Jesus rather than through a stricter observance of the Mosaic law.

Jesus' death was originally seen against the background of his ministry and his aim of forming an alternative community that might come to participate in God's reign. As the Scriptures had foretold, the powers of the present age had rejected Jesus and all that he represented, since he constituted a threat to their own pretensions. While initially Jesus' followers saw Jesus' death as comparable to the death of other prophetic figures, their belief in his resurrection and exaltation led them to the conviction that accepting him as Lord required that they be willing to dedicate their lives to doing God's will as it had been defined through Jesus and his life and death.

Against the background of these ideas, Jesus' death came to be seen as salvific because it was believed that *only by giving up his life could Jesus establish a community in which all would be fully committed to doing God's will in the way defined by him through his ministry, sufferings, and death.* He could not have expected others to be fully committed to God's will if he himself had not shown himself to be fully committed to that will to the very end. Nor could he have expected to bring into a existence a community of followers who would serve as his instrument for bringing one another and others outside of the

community into accordance with that will as they lived under Jesus' lordship.

For such a community to exist, it was necessary that it live under a Lord who had shown himself to be fully committed to serving God by serving others. The only way that Jesus could be such a Lord was by giving up his life as a consequence of his dedication to doing God's will and for the purpose of bringing about a community of people who would also be dedicated to doing God's will as defined through him and the love he had shown in life and death. And the only way Jesus could *become* such a Lord so as to *create* such a community was for God to hand him over to a violent death, rather than intervening to spare him from such a death, and then to raise and exalt him.

When Jesus' death was interpreted on the basis of Isaiah 53, the idea that Jesus bore the iniquities of others would be interpreted in the sense that he had been willing to endure sufferings and a violent death in order for others to be delivered from their persistent sinfulness and the divine condemnation that resulted from that sinfulness. This deliverance would take place as people were incorporated into the community of those living under Jesus' lordship.

It is questionable whether 2 and 4 Maccabees played any role in the development of the beliefs of Jesus' followers regarding the salvific significance of his death. If so, Jesus' death would have been seen as similar to the deaths of the Maccabean "martyrs" in the sense that he had gone to his death asking God that his efforts to bring others to live in accordance with God's will might continue and bear fruit. This would take place once Jesus had risen and the community of followers he had sought to establish had

become a reality. His blood—that is, his faithfulness unto death to the task given him by God—would lead to the purification of others in that it would serve as the means by which others would be brought into conformity with God's will as they lived under Jesus' lordship, and on that basis obtain divine forgiveness.

Contrary to what many scholars have affirmed, it is not likely that the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 played a role in the development of the early beliefs regarding the salvific significance of Jesus' death. There is also no convincing evidence that Jesus' followers believed that he had saved others by undergoing in their stead the "messianic tribulation" that some Jews were expecting before the end of the present age. Such an idea merely represents a historicized version of the doctrine of penal substitution.

The basic ideas mentioned above enable us to understand the formulas that were commonly used to allude to Jesus' death. His death was "for others" and "for their sins" in the sense that it brought to fruition everything that he had sought in his ministry, bringing about in others the same commitment to God's will manifested in him, and enabling them to obtain through him God's forgiveness on that basis. The allusions to Jesus' blood and the association of ideas such as redemption, justification, and reconciliation with God through his death or blood would also have been understood on the basis of the same ideas.

VOLUME 2: TEXTS

Chapter 11: Justification, Salvation, and the Work of Christ in Paul's Thought

This chapter questions the traditional distinction between Paul's "juristic" soteriology and his "participatory" soteriology. Jesus' death was not seen as enabling God to forgive sins or providing the basis upon which believers could be declared righteous. The idea of "participation" as it has commonly been understood among Pauline scholars is foreign to Paul. He did not teach that believers or human beings in general "participate" in Jesus or his faithfulness, sufferings, death, and resurrection, although he did maintain that believers in Jesus suffer and die with him in the sense of enduring hardships and persecution as a result of their living in love under his lordship. On this basis, they will also be raised and glorified as he was alongside of him.

For Paul, like the authors of the other New Testament writings, the basis upon which believers are forgiven is the commitment to God's will that God graciously brings about in them through faith in Jesus and all that he represents—that is, "Jesus-faith" or "Christ-faith"—, since one cannot truly believe in the God Jesus proclaimed without seeking to live in the way that Jesus taught and embodied as God's Son. In Paul's thought, believers suffer and are crucified with Jesus in the sense that they identify with all that Jesus stood for and reject the values and norms of the systems of this world as Jesus did. As a result, they face the same type of opposition and violence that he endured at the hands of that system.

* * *

The following chapters examine the specific allusions to Jesus' death in the context of the arguments in which they appear throughout the New Testament and in each case inquire as to the author's purpose in referring to Jesus' death in the way in which that author does:

Chapter 12: The Allusions to Jesus' Death in Paul's Epistles

Chapter 13: Jesus' Death in the Disputed Pauline Letters and 1 Peter

Chapter 14: Jesus' Death in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

Chapter 15: Jesus' Death in the Epistle to the Hebrews

Chapter 16: Jesus' Death in the Gospel of John, 1 John, and Revelation

* * *

The final two chapters of the work compare New Testament thought regarding the salvific significance of Jesus' death with the thought of the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, and Irenaeus of Lyons on that subject. Their purpose is to demonstrate that the ideas upon which the interpretations of Jesus' death examined in Chapter 1 are based are not found in Christian thought until the latter half of the second century CE, when Christ's saving work began to be understood in ways that were alien to New Testament thought.

Chapter 17: Jesus' Death in the Thought of the Apostolic Fathers and Justin Martyr

Chapter 18: The Work of Christ in the Thought of Melito of Sardis and Irenaeus of Lyons

* * *

Conclusion

In the Conclusion, I simply offer a brief summary of the main arguments of the work: that the traditional interpretations of the New Testament allusions to the salvific significance of Jesus' death that have prevailed since the time of Irenaeus are no longer tenable and that those allusions should instead be interpreted on the basis of the constructive proposal I have offered here. Above all, the idea that is stressed is that *in New Testament thought, neither Jesus' sufferings nor his death were believed to make atonement for sins or effect human salvation. The idea that suffering and death could atone for sins, obtain divine forgiveness, or appease God's wrath is entirely foreign to the New Testament, just as that idea is entirely foreign to second-temple Judaism.*

Equally foreign to New Testament thought—especially that of Paul—is the notion that believers are saved through “participation” in Christ and his death. Instead, what the New Testament consistently affirms is that believers have attained salvation by means of Jesus' faithfulness to his God-given task of forming an alternative community committed to living in conformity with God's will as that will has now been defined through Jesus. Believers are forgiven and accepted by God, *not on the basis of Jesus' sufferings and death, but because they have come to form part of the alternative community that God brought into existence by means of Jesus' sufferings and death—the community that Jesus gave up his life to establish and consolidate.*

This understanding of the salvific significance of Jesus' death leads to an understanding of justification and salvation that is essentially in continuity with ancient Jewish thought. In both cases, God saves people by graciously communicating his will to them and then bringing about in them through faith

the way of life that he desires and commands for the good of all. What distinguishes early Christian belief from ancient Jewish thought is not the idea that justification is by grace through faith, but that to do God's will involves following Jesus as one's Lord.

The final part of the Conclusion examines the implications of the argument of this work for believers today. Only by grasping and articulating properly the New Testament understanding of the way in which people are saved through Jesus' death can the proclamation of the gospel transform people's lives

and impact the world in the way that it did originally. For this reason, the traditional interpretations of Jesus' death considered in Chapter 1 of this work must be rejected and repudiated as contrary to the Christian Scriptures.

Of course, the work includes a full Bibliography, as well as an Index of Ancient Sources, an Index of Authors, and an Index of Subjects.

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