The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies intends to promote the hermeneutical approach to the study of the Scriptures generally known as Inductive Biblical Studies. By Inductive Biblical Study (IBS) we mean the hermeneutical movement initiated by William Rainey Harper and Wilbert Webster White that was embodied in the curriculum of the The Biblical Seminary in New York founded in 1900. This approach had precursors in the history of interpretation and has since the beginning of the twentieth century enjoyed widespread dissemination, being taught at such institutions as Princeton Theological Seminary, Columbia Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Fuller Theological Seminary, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Azusa Pacific University, and Asbury Theological Seminary, as well as hundreds of other institutions and organizations around the world.
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From the Editors

David R. Bauer

This issue represents well our desire to include a variety of types of articles bound together by a common concern to represent the commitments and practices of inductive biblical study.

We begin with two exegetical studies in the Gospels and both of which insist that attention to broader-book context significantly informs our understanding of vigorously debated passages. Drew Holland examines the meaning of the word ἐξέστη in Mark 3:21, which is usually translated “he is mad” and which suggests a negative response on the part of οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ, commonly believed to be either Jesus’s family or disciples. By contrast, Holland shows that the term actually has the positive meaning “he has amazed” and describes the awe with which the crowd experienced Jesus’ mighty works.

Jerry Breen revisits Jesus’s saying in Matt 20:28—“the Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many.” He insists that scholarly disagreement regarding the OT passage(s) that lies behind the statement, and thus the meaning of the statement, is the result of a lack of attention to the context of this passage within the Gospel of Matthew. The literary context, he concludes, leads us to see that Matthew combines the concepts of “Son of Man” (Dan 7) and “ransom” (Isa 40–55). This combination highlights how “the powerful ruler of all will intentionally sacrifice his life on behalf of his people.”

This issue also contains the final chapter from The Pedagogy of St. Paul, by Howard Tillman Kuist, a leader in the development of the inductive Bible study (IBS) movement and a member of the faculties of The Biblical Seminary in New York, Union Theological Seminary in
Virginia, and Princeton Theological Seminary. Kuist here summarizes and assesses Paul’s teaching practices: they were remarkably influential in his own time and throughout the centuries; they anticipated many of the principles urged by modern educational theorists; they addressed not only cognitive aspects of his readers and hearers but were holistically formational; they represented his deep and noble character; and they were profoundly rooted in his experience, including both his early training within the Jewish context and his later encounter with the risen Christ. Kuist’s other chapters, which appear in previous issues of this journal, tease out specific aspects of Paul’s educational method.

The IBS movement has always taken both teaching and preaching seriously. Thus, we move from Kuist’s focus on teaching to proclamation with the exposition on Psalm 124 by Stanley D. Walters. Over his long and distinguished career, Dr. Walters has combined rigorous scholarship with engaging and compelling preaching. This illuminating sermon reminds us that the biblical texts were originally essentially kerygmatic and that their study is incomplete until it breaks forth in proclamation. It demonstrates how the attentive reading of the Hebrew text combined with careful consideration of the context of the Psalter and the larger canon can lead to rich theological and spiritual insight that is immediately relevant in every age, including our own.

This issue concludes with the latest contribution to our series on Journeys in IBS. Alan J. Meenan recounts the ways in which his experience with IBS, engendered by his encounter with the teaching of Robert A. Traina, gave direction to his doctoral studies in the OT and has shaped his ministry as pastor of some of the most significant churches in Presbyterianism. The description of his employment of IBS in teaching the Bible to laypersons is both highly instructive and encouraging. And his work with The Word is Out, a global mission organization that employs IBS to equip leaders of the church in developing nations to interpret and teach the Scriptures well, points to the prominent role IBS will play throughout the world in the years ahead.
The Meaning of Ἐξέστη in Mark 3:21

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Abstract:
In examining Mark 3:21, scholars over the last century have focused their attention on the identity of οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ. The consequence is that scholarship has reached an impasse in determining who claims that Jesus has gone mad (ἐξέστη). The following paper attempts to focus instead on the meaning of Ἐξέστη in Mark 3:21 as a key to solving the interpretational difficulties that have surrounded this verse and the pericope in which it is found (Mark 3:20–30). I propose that Ἐξέστη means “he has amazed” as opposed to the traditional sense of “he has gone mad.” Moreover, it is the crowd, not οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ, who makes this claim about Jesus. This eases the exigency of locating the identity of οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ since we are no longer required to explain why either of these groups would claim Jesus’s insanity. This approach is strengthened by a literary pattern spanning Mark’s Gospel from the beginning until the passion narrative in which the crowd responds positively to Jesus, especially in contrast to religious leaders.

Keywords: Mark 3:21, Ἐξέστη, crowd, narrative criticism, redaction criticism
The Meaning of ἐξέστη in Mark 3:21

Introduction

The grammatically ambiguous text of Mark 3:21 has often puzzled interpreters. Scholars have primarily focused on the identity of οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ who go out to seize Jesus as the crowd forms a mob around his home. These also, according to the traditional translations of the passage,1 claim that Jesus has gone out of his mind. Some identify this group as his disciples;2 others claim it is his family.3 The assumption is

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1 These include the following: KJV, NRSV, NIV, NASB, and ESV.
3 This perspective seems motivated in part by a desire to protect the holiness of Mary. This explains the vociferous defense of this reading in Roman Catholic circles. Yet, the strongest reason for accepting this reading was brought to my attention by Fredrick J. Long who notes that immediately before this passage in Mark 3:14, Jesus identifies the disciples as those who will be μετ’ αὐτοῦ (a similar construction). Moreover, as Long noted, it seems natural that the disciples would view their first duty with Jesus to be crowd control. However, as we will see, I find the strongest support to lie with those who identify οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ as Jesus’ family.

This reading also has support from Jerome (“Letter CVIII, To Eustochium,” http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.v.XXII.html). There are two pieces of evidence, which point to this as the preferred reading. For one, Ben Witherington notes from a rhetorical perspective that the introduction of the family in Mark 3:21 parallels their “ reappearance” in 3:31 as part of a chiastic structure containing 3:20–35 (Mark, 153). Also, William L. Lane believes that this construction is intentionally different from the one used to describe the disciples in order that the reader may separate the two groups even though this construction in Koine Greek
that οἱ παρ’ αὐτῶν are not only the implied subject of the participle ἀκούσαντες, finite verb ἐξέρχομαι, and the complementary infinitive κρατῆσαι, but also of the finite verb ἔλεγον.⁴ On this assumption, the hermeneutical crux is to identify which group (his family or the disciples) misjudges the character of Jesus and makes the derogatory comment about him.

Yet, little attention has been paid to the Greek word used to describe Jesus here. What does it mean to say that Jesus ἐξέστη? Many modern, scholarly translations of this verse have interpreted this verb as in some way referring to Jesus’s madness.⁵ In fact, this is the interpretation we generally find for this verb since the publication of the Vulgate, which translates it as in furorem versus est. Curiously, however, several scholars have noted that this is a unique meaning for this verb in the Gospels.⁶ Elsewhere in the Gospels and Acts we find that ἐξίστησιν has a more positive sense of mental “displacement,” that of “amazement” or “awe.” Surely, the preference for the negative meaning in modern translations is due to grammatical issues. After all, Mark does not provide an object for this verb. As such, it most likely carries an intransitive sense: among the possible meanings for this verb in the intransitive, the one that makes the most sense is that which translators since Jerome have adopted.⁷

In contrast, the following paper argues against the long-held consensus of translating ἐξέστη to refer to Jesus’s madness. Rather, I propose here that this verb carries the more positive and causative

⁴ See Best for the rationale for taking the implied subjects of these verbs as the same, “Mark III,” 309–12; Cf., Moloney, Mark, 80–82; Steinmueller, “Exegetical Notes,” 357–59.

⁵ E.g., NRSV—“he has gone out of his mind”; NASB—“he has lost his senses”; NIV—“he is out of his mind.”


⁷ For the semantic range of this verb, as well as its usage in the transitive and intransitive, see BDAG, s.v. “ἐξίστησιν”; LSJ, s.vv. “ἐξίστησιν,” “ἐξίστάναι.”
connotation of “he amazed.” Moreover, it is ὁ ὄχλος, not οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ, who make this claim about Jesus. The role of οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ is to go out to seize Jesus to protect him from the admiring crowd. This paper will attempt to redirect the debate about the identity of οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ since I will argue that it is not this group who makes this claim about Jesus and that the claim is not even negative. Thus, the concern over preserving the character of the disciples or Jesus’s family is in vain. Succinctly, I argue here for a reading of Mark 3:21b that may be translated: “And having heard, the ones near him [the disciples or his family] went out to take hold of him; for they [the crowd] were saying that he has amazed [us].”

My argument hinges upon a number of factors. First, Mark uses ἐξίστηµι verbs intentionally throughout his Gospel to depict the reaction to Jesus’s miracles. In fact, the other Synoptic authors also utilize it in their Gospels. In Mark 3:21, then, ἐξέστη specifically refers to how Jesus has amazed the crowd with his miracles. Second, Mark’s linguistic context (i.e., both the Septuagint and the ancient Greco-Roman world) points to this as the more likely meaning. Third, my interpretation of Mark 3:21 parallels the texts of Matthew and Luke, which also include the more positive sense of this verb as a reaction of the crowd. Fourth, there are several other arguments, both within and outside of Mark’s Gospel, that support this reading. In sum, I will argue for a complete reframing of this passage’s translation and of the scholarly debate on this verse.

Ἐξίστηµι and Miracles in Mark and NT Narrative

In the narrative literature of the NT, ἐξίστηµι has a restricted semantic range. Almost unanimously, this verb connotes a positive, albeit disrupted, mental state. Commonly, this verb is translated as “astounded,” “amazed,” or “astonished” in popular translations like the NRSV, NASB, and NIV. The only exception is Mark 3:21, where these translations interpret ἐξέστη as: “he has gone out of his mind,”
“he has lost his senses,” and “he is out of his mind,” respectively. They see the semantic freight of this verb as resembling 2 Cor 5:13 where it certainly refers to a derogatory assertion about one’s mental state.8

Nevertheless, commentators have not focused enough on the way this verb is utilized within its specific genre, that is, NT narrative. Not only does ἐξίστημι carry the more positive meaning throughout this larger body of literature, it does so within a specific context. This verb always (unless Mark 3:21 is the only exception) refers to the reaction of a group after a miraculous act.9 Except for Acts 8:11 where it refers to the crowd’s response to Simon the Magician, these miracles are of divine nature. The chart below lists the instances of ἐξίστημι in NT narrative literature with their context and common translations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>NRSV, NASB, NIV</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 12:23</td>
<td>ἐξίσταντο</td>
<td>amazed, amazed, astonished</td>
<td>Crowd’s response to the healing of the demoniac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 2:12</td>
<td>ἐξίστασθαι</td>
<td>amazed, amazed, amazed</td>
<td>Crowd’s response to the healing of the paralytic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 3:21</td>
<td>ἔξοσθη</td>
<td>out of his mind, lost his senses, out of his mind</td>
<td>Crowd’s claim about Jesus after following him to his house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 5:42</td>
<td>ἐξεστησαν</td>
<td>overcome with amazement, completely astounded, completely astonished</td>
<td>Crowd’s response to the restoration of the little girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 6:51</td>
<td>ἐξίσταντο</td>
<td>utterly astounded, utterly astonished, completely amazed</td>
<td>Apostles’ response to the stilling of the storm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 On this parallel between Mark 3:21 and 2 Cor 5:13, see France, *Mark*, 167.

9 Another exception could be Luke 2:47, in which those in the temple are amazed at the boy Jesus’s teaching. This depends on whether one sees this event as miraculous.

10 I.e., “the ones near” Jesus. See notes 2 and 3 above.
| Luke 2:47 | ἐξίσταντο | amazed, amazed, | Response of those who heard Jesus as a boy teach in the temple |
| Luke 8:56 | ἐξέστησαν | astounded, amazed, astonished | Crowd’s response to the restoration of the little girl |
| Luke 24:22 | ἐξέστησαν | they astounded, they amazed, they amazed | Apostles’ response to the women’s resurrection report |
| Acts 2:7 | ἐξίσταντο | amazed, amazed, amazed | Crowd’s response to the Holy Spirit at Pentecost |
| Acts 2:12 | ἐξίσταντο | amazed, continued in amazement, amazed | Crowd’s response to the Holy Spirit at Pentecost |
| Acts 8:9 | ἐξιστάνων | amazed, astonishing, amazed | Crowd’s response to Simon the Magician |
| Acts 8:11 | ἐξεστακέναι | amazed, astonished, amazed | Crowd’s response to Simon the Magician |
| Acts 8:13 | ἐξίστατο | amazed, amazed, astonished | Simon the Magician after his conversion |
| Acts 9:21 | ἐξίσταντο | amazed, amazed, astonished | Crowd’s response after listening to Paul’s post-conversion teaching |
| Acts 10:45 | ἐξέστησαν | astounded, amazed, astonished | Peter’s state after his vision |
| Acts 12:16 | ἐξέστησαν | amazed, amazed, astonished | Response of Mary’s household in seeing Peter after his imprisonment |

We may suggest from the evidence above that this verb has a specific semantic range in NT narrative literature. It almost always refers to the reaction of a group after a miracle of some sort. Both Mark 2:12 and 5:42, which surround 3:21, depict a crowd amazed at a miracle of Jesus. In Mark 6:51, the disciples are amazed after Jesus stills the storm. My contention is that the verb in Mark 3:21 denotes the crowd’s response to what occurred in 2:12 and it sets the stage for the responses in 5:42 and 6:51. In Mark 2:12, the crowd is amazed at the healing of the paralytic and the accompanying note that they “were glorifying God” clearly points to the positive meaning of this verb. The
reference to Mark 2:12 in 3:21 becomes stronger when we realize that both events take place in parallel settings. The healing of ch. 2 occurs at Jesus’s home (Mark 2:1) and with a crowd so large that “there was no longer room for them; not even in front of the door…” (2:2). In Mark 3:21, he refers to the crowd to claim that Jesus “has amazed” them before. Now this astonishment leads them to surround and fill his house again because they desire to see more of these miracles and the man who performs them.

Scholars have yet to see this connection, which unlike most interpretations of this passage converges well with the data at hand in the Gospel.11 As we read Mark’s narrative synchronically while considering the crowd’s response up to Mark 3:21, this is the only possible meaning of ἐξίστημι the reader would be accustomed to supply. Moreover, nowhere in Mark does the crowd respond negatively to Jesus’s miracles. The miracles of Mark 5:42 and 6:51 continue this literary pattern of positive reactions.

We may also see that Mark intentionally uses this verb to describe a reaction to miracles because it contrasts with other similar words throughout his Gospel. For example, in Mark 5:20; 6:5; 10:32; 12:11; and 12:17, he employs θαυμάζω to describe reaction to Jesus’s teachings and other actions. In Mark 1:27, those present in the synagogue ἐθαμβήσαν at both Jesus’s teaching and his exorcism of the man with the unclean spirit. Given that there are two objects of the crowd’s amazement, Mark assigns a different verb altogether to describe the reaction of the crowd. So, of the nine instances in Mark in which there is a response to an action or teaching of Jesus, the evidence suggests that the author intentionally presents a clear demarcation with his verbal usage to describe a similar response. It is most likely, then, that the response in 3:2 carries the same, positive connotation as the other instances of ἐξίστημι.

11 Timothy Dwyer enumerates the importance of the wonder motif in Mark, although he follows the traditional interpretation of Mark 3:21 (“The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark,” JNT 57 [1995]: 49–59; and The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996]).
Mark, the earliest Gospel, sets the tone for the other Evangelists to utilize this literary pattern. Matthew only picks up on it once, but in an important place as we will see below. Luke, nevertheless, utilizes this form extensively in his Gospel and Acts as demonstrated in the chart above. What we have is a literary pattern utilized by the Evangelists, namely that Jesus’s miracles received a response that is consistently described with ἑστημι.

Interestingly, this use of ἑστημι is rare in the ancient world. Barry Blackburn, who follows Gerd Theissen, notes that pre-Christian literature seldom marks a response to miracles, but when it does, ἑλπίζω and ἐκπλήσσω are used. The most likely explanation for the NT’s connection of ἑστημι to a positive reaction to a miracle is an underlying tradition that circulated throughout Christian communities.

Since Jerome, one of the primary reasons ἑστημι has been translated in the intransitive sense of madness is because no object is supplied for the verb. In fact, standard lexicons note that the transitive or causative sense of this verb often takes additional words. If we were to translate it as I propose, we would expect to find ἡμᾶς following the verb. But two factors suggest that an object is not needed. First, examples from other ancient Greek literature suggest that an object is not needed to complete the sense of the verb. This is not a typical grammatical construction, however, it does appear in literature beyond

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14 See BDAG, s.v. “ἐστημι”; LSJ, s.vv. “ἐστημι,” “ἐχτάνω.”

15 Cf. Pausanias, *Descr.* 3.17.8; Plutarch, *Publ.*, 13.2. I acknowledge that these instances carry different semantic freight than what I propose in Mark 3:21. Yet, the uses of ἑστημι are so broad in the ancient world that translations of “madness” and “amazement” are seldom found outside of the Bible. Nevertheless, these examples underscore the fact that transitive verbs in ancient Greek do not always require objects.
the “lower,” Koine Greek of Mark. Moreover, Daniel B. Wallace notes that transitive verbs will often omit the subject if it is implied due to Greek’s economical nature.\(^{16}\) So, in 3:21, Mark’s readers would infer the omitted object (i.e., the crowd—recalling the crowd’s similar response to Jesus’s miracle in 2:12). Second, this is consistent with Mark’s usage elsewhere. In 14:16, after Jesus’s command to the disciples to prepare the Passover meal, Mark writes \(καὶ\ εὑρὸν\ καθὼς\ εἶπεν\ αὐτοῖς\). How do we know what the disciples “found”? We must infer it from the previous context just as we must do in 3:21.

My argument also requires that the crowd is the group making this claim about Jesus. Because this reading departs from the dominant translation since Jerome, it requires clarification regarding the subject of the verb. Scholars have intensely debated whether the implied subject is Jesus’s disciples or his family.\(^{17}\) They then link the subject of \(ἔλεγον\) to the nearby \(οἱ\ παρ’\ αὐτοῦ\). Since the structure of the passage is a typical Markan “sandwich” (i.e., when a recurring element appears at the beginning and end of a block of material) and since the family of Jesus is mentioned in 3:31, I read (with many others) \(οἱ\ παρ’\ αὐτοῦ\ as referring to Jesus’s family.\(^{18}\) However, the proximity of \(οἱ\ παρ’\ αὐτοῦ\ to \(ἔλεγον\ suggests that if this phrase does describe his family, they are the ones who make this claim about him.

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\(^{17}\) See notes 2 and 3 above.

\(^{18}\) Witherington, *Mark*, 153; Stein, *Mark*, 180; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 271; France, *Mark*, 165–66. Each of these commentators note the use of the sandwich structure to determine this. As with Mark 3:21, there is no condemnation of Jesus by his family in 3:31, so if his family were \(οἱ\ παρ’\ αὐτοῦ\, we cannot say that the connection of these two verses indicate that Jesus’s family misunderstands him. As we will see below, this is not necessary for Mark to make his point about the household. Rather, Jesus’s family brings new definition to the new, boundary-less family (i.e., the church) that Mark’s Jesus seeks to create. Regarding the use of the sandwich structure, this device helps us to understand the identity of the \(οἱ\ παρ’\ αὐτοῦ\, but it has no bearing on the claim made about Jesus.
Another option for the subject is ὁ ὀχλος in 3:20, which no scholar consulted has defended.19 An obvious objection is that ὀχλος is singular while the verb is plural. However, since ὀχλος is a collective noun, subsequent verbs that take it as the subject may reflect this. Indeed, Wallace notes that this phenomenon often occurs as a subconscious action of the writer when the referent is nearby.20 In fact, Mark does just this in 3:32 when he writes καὶ ἐκάθητο περὶ αὐτὸν ὀχλος, καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· Ἰδοὺ ἡ μήτηρ σου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί σου ἔξω ζητοῦσίν σε. The proximity of this phenomenon with ὀχλος so near to 3:21 suggests that Mark does the same in the passage under examination.

Another factor that has led interpreters to overlook ὀχλος as the subject of ἔλεγον is that they have read ἔξεστη as necessarily intransitive.21 If Mark had more clearly marked the object of ἔξεστη, we would be able to read the verb causatively and more readily make the connection to the crowd’s similar response in 2:12. Nevertheless, when we see Mark’s tendency to refer to ὀχλος as the implied subject of plural verbs in combination with his economic style of occasionally leaving off objects from transitive verbs, the interpretation of this passage becomes readily understandable. We no longer need to be caught up in the debate about whether Jesus’s disciples or his family make this unflattering claim about him, because neither does. Rather, it is the crowd that does so and the claim they make is, to the contrary, quite positive: the crowd declares their amazement at his miracles. This adds a new dimension to the long-running debate about the interpretation of this passage.

19 However, Best admits that this is a grammatical possibility (“Mark III,” 312).
21 This is most evident in the minority interpretations of this passage in which some scholars claim that ὀχλος is the subject of ἔξεστη, which allows the verb to remain transitive (Wansbrough, “Mark 3:21,” 234; P.J. Gannon, “Could Mark Employ Auton in 3,21 Referring to Ochlos in 3,20?” CBQ 15 [1953]: 460–61; Steinmueller, “Exegetical Notes,” 357). Yet, Wansbrough’s thesis has been thoroughly critiqued by many scholars (e.g., Wenham, “Meaning,” 299; Stein, Mark, 180–81; France, Mark 165, n. 32).
One may ask, in opposition to my thesis, why I would choose to point out Mark’s intentional linguistic style while simultaneously noting his poor grammar. Should we read Mark either with more charity toward his syntax than I allow or should we not read so much into his verbal intentionality? As redaction criticism has demonstrated, the Evangelists were not concerned to write unbiased accounts. In fact, in comparing the Synoptic Gospels, we can discern the themes that were important to them against those of their counterparts.22 Here I claim that Mark intentionally uses ἐξίστημι verbs in response to Jesus’s miracles. Yet, Mark’s care in revealing the importance of the crowd in responding to Jesus’s miracles is not the same as averring his grammatical clarity. Scholars have long noted Mark’s difficult syntax while simultaneously drawing out his emphases.23 Thus, we can posit that Mark 3:21 uses ἐξίστη to communicate a particular point within an admittedly ambiguous grammatical context.

Ἀξίστημι and Mark’s Linguistic Context

At this point, we must be wary of arguing solely on the basis of “verbal parallelogramia.”24 Instead, we must consider this verb’s broader context beyond the NT. Ἐξίστημι is widely attested in the ancient world. Although it has no single common meaning, it carries the general semantic freight of “displacement.” However, we find that by the first century CE this verb carries a broad range of meanings, including that its meanings can be subdivided into its physical sense as we often find in political history (i.e., “abandon” or “move someone”), and its mental sense as we unanimously find in the Gospels and often in medical texts. In fact, we find that it means everything from “to

deviate,”25 “to jump,”26 “to abandon,”27 and several other meanings28 including the options before us.29 Clearly, context is important to determine its specific meaning. What is more, the lexicons distinguish between its transitive and intransitive senses on the basis of whether or not the verb takes an object as well as whether the verb appears as a first or second aorist.30 But, as we have seen above, the former does not universally apply and the latter is unhelpful here since ἐξέστη appears in the same form in both the first and second aorist.

So, we can only state that the ancient Greek linguistic context affirms the two translational options before us. If anything, an examination of the semantic range of ἐξέστη and its cognates shows that there are more options available than we might expect. Indeed, I find it puzzling that scholars have not more frequently reexamined the semantic range of this verb in Mark 3:21 given the confusion this verse has caused interpreters.31 It pushes us to examine both the context of the verb, as well as other aspects of its context beyond ancient Greek literature.

This leads us then to investigate whether Mark is drawing from a source in the Septuagint. According to the marginal notes of the NA28 this would appear to be the case. It lists as possible allusions Ps 69:9, Isa 28:7, and Zech 13:3. Among modern commentators, Adele Yarboro Collins is the sole scholar consulted to note a connection to one of these texts—she sees strong support of the traditional reading of this passage from Ps 69:9. For her, a link exists in how Jesus (in Mark 3:21) and the Psalmist (in 69:9) are each ridiculed by their

26 Cf. Pausanius, Deser. 3.17.8.
27 Cf. Plutarch, Pomp. 10.2.
28 BDAG, s.v. “ἐξέστημι”; LSJ, s.vv. “ἐξέστημι,” “ἐχιστάω.”
29 For the sense of “madness,” see Dioscorides Pedanius, Mat. Med. 4.73; Hippocrates, Coac. 429; Hippocrates, Aph. 6:59.1. For amazement, see Musonius fragment 8p. 35H., Philippides, Com. Fragment 27K.
30 BDAG, s.v. “ἐξέστημι”; LSJ, s.vv. “ἐξέστημι,” “ἐχιστάω.”

respective families. She writes, “The reproach and shame borne by the speaker are connected...with the misunderstanding of his charismatic activity.”32 Yet, this link is purely thematic for her since ἐξέστη does not appear in the Septuagint of Ps 69:9. And, if my evaluation of Mark 3:21 is correct, we cannot conclude that this verb is used in a derogatory sense, nor should we identify the subject as Jesus’s family.

This negative judgment pertains to Zech 13:3 as well. This verse is situated within an “oracle against the nations” in which fathers and mothers shame their false prophet children. Thus, any allusion in Mark 3:21 would have to be from the side of those who claim Jesus is mad. Yet again, we run into similar objections: we must assume that Jesus’s family makes this declaration and there are no syntactic or verbal parallels here.

The most likely parallel is Isa 28:7 in which God condemns Ephraim for its drunken pride. In the LXX, we find a lexical parallel in the claim about prophets and priests who ἐξέστησαν διὰ τὸν οἶνον. Moreover, we find a syntactic parallel with the implementation of the causal conjunction γὰρ. It appears possible that Mark, if he is drawing from Isa 28:7, depicts the crowd as claiming Jesus to be a drunkard like one of the prophets of Ephraim. Yet Mark does not indicate elsewhere that Jesus is perceived as drunk. And, as we have already seen, the only person or group up to this point in Mark’s Gospel who would have reason to make any negative remarks against him is the religious leaders. Although there are linguistic and vague thematic connections between Isa 28:7 and Mark 3:21, the contexts of these passages do not offer a strong enough link between them.

Indeed, in the LXX one is hard-pressed to find an ἐξέστησαμεν verb carrying a meaning that entails madness. Of the thirty-seven occurrences of ἐξέστησαμεν verbs in the LXX, it carries the sense of amazement six times.33 Isa 28:7 is the only instance in which we could interpret this verb with a sense of madness, even though it carries the

32 Collins, Mark, 227.
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sense of physical “staggering.” The other instances in the LXX reveal the broad semantic range of ἐξίστημι verbs that we find in other Greek literature. If Mark were drawing upon the LXX for this passage, it would not be to support any particular translation of ἐξέστη.

Mark 3:21 and the Synoptic Problem

Oddly, scholars have largely ignored the relationship between Mark’s version of this narrative and those of Matthew and Luke. Given that Greek literature and the LXX have not produced desirable parallels to understand this passage, we must now investigate the relationship between Mark 3:19b–30 and parallel passages in Matt 12:22–32 and Luke 11:14–23. The chart below displays these parallels and attempts to match similar sections of these texts with like colors.

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<td>19b Then he went home and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”</td>
<td>22 Then they brought to him a demoniac who was blind and mute; and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see. All the crowds were amazed and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”</td>
<td>14 Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 And the scribes</td>
<td>23 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by</td>
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34 The latter is the approach of the NRSV.

35 Cf. 1 Sam 4:15—“the raiders trembled”; Isa 16:3—“do not betray”; Jb 5:13—“the schemes are brought to an end”; 2 Chr 15:6—“God troubled them.”

36 The only scholar who sees a Synoptic parallel here is Steinmueller, who argues that the crowd is amazed (“Exegetical Notes,” 357–58). However, interpreters have since followed John Dominic Crossan in seeing Mark 3:21 as a work of Mark’s own hand, to the point that Guelich notes that there is no parallel between Mark and the other Synoptics (John Dominic Crossan, “Mark and Relatives of Jesus,” NovT 15 [1969]: 46–55; Guelich, Mark 1–8, 168).
who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” 23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 But if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

28 “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—30 for they had Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons.” 31 Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be of the demons.”

16 Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. 17 But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 18 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? 19 If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. 22 But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted
From the outset, we see why scholars have often overlooked the parallels between these passages. For one, there is a different frame between Mark’s version of this story and the other parallels. Mark 3:19b sets his narrative in Jesus’s home. The discourse on the divided kingdom is prompted by the claim (by the disciples, his family, or the crowd) that Jesus ἐξέστη (Mark 3:21) and the scribes’ accusation that he has Beelzebul (Mark 3:22). In Matthew (12:22–24) and Luke (11:14–15), on the other hand, the narrative begins with Jesus casting out a demon. Luke includes a plea from the crowds to perform a sign (11:16). In Matthew, the crowds are amazed and the Pharisees claim Jesus has Beelzebul. In Luke, some of the crowd is amazed and others claim Jesus has Beelzebul. Also, in Matthew (12:25) and Luke (11:17), Jesus knows what his accusers are thinking, whereas in Mark, we are not told whether Jesus hears the accusation or intuits it.

Moreover, each of these accounts is respectively set within a different place the Gospels. Mark places this pericope after Jesus appoints the disciples (3:13–18) and prior to the discourse on his true family (3:31–35). This narrative in Matthew follows an editorial insertion concerning Jesus’s fulfillment of an Isaianic prophesy (12:15–21) and before the discourse on a tree and its fruit (12:33–37). Luke positions it after two discourses on prayer (11:1–13) and preceding another discourse on unclean spirits (11:24–26).

Nevertheless, two points guide us to seeing a parallel with 3:21. The first is that there must be an underlying source that includes the discourse on the “house-divided” and its narrative. Matthew and Luke were certainly aware of the narrative frame of the “house-divided” discourse given their knowledge of Mark, but they both chose to
include another narrative tradition. That Matthew and Luke agree so closely points to a common written source with some slight editorial adjustments. Yet, the hypothetical Q source, which includes the material Matthew and Luke share against Mark, only contains sayings of Jesus. Why, then, do they agree against Mark in a purely narrative section?

We could posit several explanations. One is to say that Matthew and Luke share another source that includes narrative material. Yet, this would provide only one example of such a source and one would have to explain why Matthew and Luke so seldom agree against Mark with narrative material. Another option is to argue that Q includes narrative material, but this theory meets the same challenge as the prior one. Finally, one could also adopt the theory that Luke used Matthew as a source. However, the arguments against this theory are too numerous to recount here.37

The most likely proposition is that there is an underlying tradition that all three share (whether written or oral). That is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all had access to some source in which the discourse on the strong man was packaged and each tailored the narrative to suit his needs. The most illuminating rationale for this is that Matthew and Luke often correct Mark’s difficult grammar.38 We have already established that the grammar of Mark 3:21 leaves many ambiguities, and that it has long disconcerted interpreters. This explains why Matthew would edit Mark’s ἐξέστη into ἐξίσταντο (Matt 12:23), thus transforming the verb from causative to intransitive and clarifying the verb’s subject. Luke then avoids the trouble of reckoning with this verb altogether—we have already seen carries a broad semantic range—and describes the crowd as ἐθαύμασαν (Luke 11:14).

This leads to another rationale from redaction criticism. That is, Mark had knowledge of this narrative frame for the parable of the strong man, but chose to exclude it in keeping with his theological

37 Stein, Studying, 125–42.
38 Stein, Studying, 49–96.
emphasis of the household. Scholars have long noted the importance of the household theme in Mark, as he wishes to stress the idea that Jesus's coming kingdom is a new eschatological household.  

Mark specifically chose to reframe the narrative such that the setting for the telling of the parable of the strong man is a house. He succinctly retained the connection of this story to Jesus’s miracles with the economical inclusion of ἐξέστη in Mark 3:21 while changing the narrative frame to fit his theological emphasis. This, in combination with the grammatical-redactional tendencies of Matthew and Luke, point overwhelmingly to a shared underlying source that contains Mark 3:21.

The second point that suggests Mark 3:21 belongs in parallel with Matthew and Luke is that, regardless of the narrative frame, all three Gospels preserve this pericope as a chreia. Specifically, it fulfills the requirements of pronouncement story, a “brief narrative ending with a pronouncement by someone in response to a saying or observation.”

In the Markan passage we have a brief narrative of the crowd, the ὅλος παρ' αὐτοῦ, and the scribes in Jesus’s house, followed by Jesus’s response to the claims about him. His reply is a “response-sayings chreia.” Not only does Jesus respond to the claim about him, his statement also fulfills the requirement of including a participle to introduce the saying (in this case, προσκαλεσάµενος). Within the response-sayings chreiai are, in order, a rhetorical question (3:23b), four consecutive parables (3:24–27), and a concluding aphorism (3:29–29).

Duane F. Watson notes that the Evangelists had chreiai of Jesus at hand and these helped to shape their Gospels. If this passage were already developed as a comprehensive chreia, Jesus’s response in the form of parables was not disembodied, but rather came in tandem with the

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39 For the most thorough explication of this, see Michael F. Trainor, The Quest for Home: The Household in Mark’s Community (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

40 This comports with the grammatical insight above (n. 16), that causative verbs in Koine Greek will often omit an object for economical purposes.


surrounding narrative since it was the cause of the parable. Even though Matthew and Luke favor Q’s version of Jesus’s discourse, it is unlikely that Q as a sayings source would have provided the same narrative frame, and therefore, the same statements that initiated Jesus’s response.

Given the above, we can plausibly propose that Mark retains the same split reaction to Jesus initiating the parable of the strong man. In Matthew, the crowds are amazed at what Jesus does whereas the Pharisees condemn him, thus providing the setting for the discourse. Luke divides the crowd in their reaction to Jesus and he promptly responds. If my argument in this section is correct, Mark uses the same underlying narrative that leads to Jesus’s response, which leads to a similar split reaction. The crowd’s reaction is positive while the scribes, another set of religious leaders, provide the contrasting negative reaction. If this is the case, the ἐξέστη in 3:21 must carry its positive sense.

Other Evidence for the Split Response

There are a few other pieces of evidence that suggest Mark intends to portray a positive reaction from the crowd in 3:21. First, we will look to the Gospel itself to reveal Markan tendencies that point to this reading. Next, we will look to the extra-Biblical sources that support such a reading.

Primarily, Mark reveals two patterns that point to a positive reaction from the crowd in Mark 3:21, which is contrasted with a negative reaction of the scribes in 3:22. The first is that Mark consistently portrays the crowd’s reaction to Jesus as positive until the crucifixion. This is evident in Mark 2:12, 13; 5:21, 27; 6:45; 8:1; 9:14–17; 10:1; 11:8, 32; 12:12, 37. Moreover, Mark always sets the crowd’s response to Jesus in juxtaposition to that of the religious leaders. We see this in Mark 2:1–11; 13–17; 9:1; 11:18; and 12:28–37.
The meaning of ἐξέστη in Mark 3:21

The crucifixion provides a crucial turning point in Mark’s narrative whereby the crowd’s reaction to Jesus turns negative.⁴⁴

The second pattern is that Jesus’s disciples always protect him from an adoring crowd, not an upset one. This is present in Mark 3:9; 6:36; 8:4; 10:48; and 14:47. Although the identity of εἶ παρ’ αὐτῶν in Mark 3:21 is often debated, nearly all commentators agree that it is Jesus who is seized and that either his disciples or his family is protecting him from the crowd.⁴⁵ Where scholarship has failed in this respect is the reason for seizing Jesus. But, it would not be Markan style to indicate that they restrained him from an irate crowd and there is nothing in the context to indicate this. Rather, they restrained Jesus because the crowd adored him and wanted to come closer to this miracle worker. This sets the stage for the crowd’s positive reaction to Jesus, which the scribes soon attempt to squelch.

A significant objection to seeing Mark 3:21–22 as a split reaction to Jesus is the presence of the καὶ that separates the two reactions. Typically, in the NT, and especially in Mark, καὶ functions ascensively (i.e., “even”) or connectively (i.e., “and” or “also”).⁴⁶ The presence of καὶ in 3:22 has signaled to previous interpreters that Mark attributes a further negative accusation in 3:21. However, καὶ may also serve a contrastive function, thus, indicating that two clauses are related but carry opposite meaning.⁴⁷ In fact, the nature of καὶ is not to relate two identical grammatical items, but simply to connect them. Thus, Steven E. Runge writes, “the use of καὶ constrains the connected element to

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⁴⁴ Although interpreters have long conceived of the crucifixion as the climax of the Gospel, I direct the reader to the following for contrasting views: Morna D. Hooker, “Good News About Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” in Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect, ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Kelly R. Iverson (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 165–80; Mary Healy, The Gospel of Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 320; Mary Ann Beavis, Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 207.

⁴⁵ Exceptions who claim that the crowd is the object of the verb κρατῆσαι include: Wansbrough, “Mark 3:21,” 233–35; and Steinmueller, “Exegetical Notes,” 357–58.


⁴⁷ Wallace, Greek Grammar, 671–72.
be closely associated with what comes before, regardless of whether there is semantic continuity or not. The implication is that the elements joined by καὶ are of equal status. Context, then, is crucial to determine how a καὶ functions semantically.

Thus, καὶ alone is not sufficient evidence to refute a split reaction in Mark 3:21–22. Not only has the preceding analysis shown that the literary context of Mark’s Gospel urges us to view these verses as a split response, but we can point to at least two other places in Mark where this clearly occurs. In Mark 1:22, he uses καὶ to contrast Jesus’s teaching with that of the scribes, and in 9:14, Mark implements καὶ to contrast the positive reaction of the crowd with the negative reaction of scribes as both groups gather around the disciples. Since the latter example parallels the sequence and ethos of Mark 3:22–23 (only in this instance, the disciples draw a crowd instead of Jesus), this provides convincing evidence that Mark used καὶ where two things are contrasted. All of this, therefore, encourages us to read the first καὶ of Mark 3:22 as connecting two contrasted items.

Another literary argument for reading Mark 3:21–22 as a split reaction to Jesus is that, if we understand ἐξέστη in the positive sense, it illuminates the word play with the other ἴστη verbs in Mark 3:24–26. Because of the preponderance of these verbs in this passage, Mark intentionally links the claim about Jesus in 3:21 with his own response in 3:24–26 in an ironic way. That is, Mark’s Jesus plays on the different meanings of ἐξέστη to show that he is not “insane,” but rather the one who is overturning Satan’s kingdom.

What makes this the more probable reading is the way in which the word play enumerates the relationship between his miracles and the creation of a new household. Miracles are not and end in themselves, rather they point to the coming of God’s Kingdom.

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49 Runge, _Discourse_ , 24.

50 Barry L. Blackburn, “Miracles,” _DJG1_ , 549–59, especially sec. 3.2.
the work that builds the Kingdom by first destroying this kingdom (or household) of Satan. That Jesus can perform these miracles confronts not only Satan but also the religious leaders of his day who believed themselves to be the only ones rightly endowed with this authority from God.\textsuperscript{51}

The household theme is just as politically charged. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, the household was the place in which citizens would be trained in virtue for religious and public life.\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, it included various kinds of kinship relationships between the paterfamilias and the remainder of the household, including slaves.\textsuperscript{53} Jesus’s new household as we find in ch. 3 defies convention by creating new public and religious virtues, which then encompasses one kinship relationship to God for all who are obedient (cf. Mark 3:35). The real irony in Mark 3:20–30 is that Jesus’s amazing miracles are not just displacing the minds of the crowd, but the very foundation of Satan’s household and the social institutions of the ancient world. Jesus is not pushing back against detractors with the word play, but rather affirming that the statement of the crowd is true in a way they cannot yet see. The word play permits a political reading of this passage in a manner scholars have not been able to see with the traditional rendering of ἐξέστη.

Unfortunately, the early church did not produce many commentaries on Mark and early interpreters often preferred Matthew and Luke when quoting from the Synoptics, so, it is difficult to confirm my reading with the earliest interpreters. However, some evidence exists from the early church in support of a split reaction to Jesus in these verses. First, Aquinas’s Catena Aurea preserves a comment from Pseudo-Chrysostom (ca. 5\textsuperscript{th} century CE) on this passage that states,

\textsuperscript{52} Craig S. Keener, “Family/Household,” DNTB, 353.
“Ungrateful indeed were the multitudes of princes, whom their pride hinders from knowledge, but the grateful multitude of the people came to Jesus.”\(^{54}\) This implies an early Christian tradition of seeing the crowd as adorers of Jesus in opposition to the skeptical scribes. This, then, affirms my reading that the subject of \(\varepsilon\varepsilon\tau\eta\) is the crowd.

Likewise, Tatian’s *Diatesseron* (2\(^{nd}\) century CE) conflates this episode with the parallel accounts of Matthew and Luke. Before the Pharisees’ claim that Jesus has Beelzebul, Tatian writes, “And the multitudes marveled.”\(^{55}\) Admittedly, this is the weaker of the two points of early evidence since Tatian might have simply preferred the Matthean and Lukan reading. Even so, this would only underscore the legitimacy of the parallels between the Synoptics on this passage. In addition to Pseudo-Chrysostom, who explicitly deals with the passage from Mark, we find further evidence that the early church, at least in the East, viewed the reaction to Jesus as split between the crowd and the Pharisees.

Indeed, there appears to be a division in the early interpretation of Mark 3:21 between East and West. Notably, Bede and Theophylact of Ohrid follow the traditional reading that Jesus was “crazy.”\(^{56}\) All of these can be traced to Jerome’s reading noted in the introduction. Pseudo-Chrysostom, an Eastern interpreter writing soon after Jerome and long before the Vulgate became the authoritative text, would still be using the Greek text. As a Western writer, Bede would have been familiar with Jerome’s reading. By the time Theophylact wrote his commentary (11\(^{th}\) century CE), Jerome’s text and interpretation would have been familiar, if not authoritative.

In fact, the extant writings of these commentators are not the only witnesses that the interpretation of this passage differed between East

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and West. Codex Washingtonianus, Codex Bezae, and the Old Latin attempted to clarify this verse by noting that the scribes and the people went out to seize Jesus, thus departing from either option in the modern debate about the identity of the ὁ παρ’ αὐτῶν. It appears that these Western textual witnesses want to portray a mob, including the scribes, as those who go out to seize Jesus. In turn, this would lay the groundwork for Jerome’s later reading, assuming he had access to one of these recensions. However, the Eastern textual traditions do not preserve this reading and Eastern interpreters like Pseudo-Chrysostom and Tatian, who would have read a version of these verses as they appear in the NA28 (and most likely the older reading), understand a split reaction in Mark 3:21–22.

Therefore, there is a plethora of evidence both within Mark’s Gospel and outside of it that support the split reaction to Jesus, between that of the crowd in 3:21 and that of the scribes in 3:22. This split reaction supports my reading that Jesus has “amazed” and that this claim about him was from the lips of the crowd. Thus, I turn now to a reconstruction of the verse with concluding remarks.

Reconstruction of Mark 3:21 and the Ongoing Scholarly Debate

The above has provided evidence for a reevaluation of Mark 3:21. It offers us a new way to understand a verse which has long confounded scholars and commentators, and it brings us to a greater understanding of the Gospel according to Mark. My proposal is that the following provides the best translation of Mark 3:21: “And having heard, the ones near him [the disciples or his family] went out to take hold of him; for they [the crowd] were saying that he has amazed [us].”

We see that the reinterpretation of ἐξέστη impacts the remainder of the verse. First, we may understand κράτησα in its less severe sense
of simply “using one’s hands to establish close contact” since we have recognized that οἱ παρ’ αὐτῶι are attempting to protect Jesus. Although I find it likely οἱ παρ’ αὐτῶι refers to Jesus’s family by means of the Markan sandwich structure, it is irrelevant for the purposes of this argument. Rather, οἱ παρ’ αὐτῶι is not the group that makes the claim that Jesus is supposedly mad even though few scholars have considered this as a viable possibility. As we have seen, the subject of ἔλεγον is δῶς ἥλιος from the prior verse. This reading keeps with Mark’s syntactic and narrative style and it further characterizes the crowd that has been following Jesus. This, then, shifts the debate in a new direction by introducing a party in the narrative whose value to this pericope scholars have underappreciated.

Moreover, the content of the crowd’s claim is not negative, as scholars have long supposed. Rather, the argument provided here suggests that the positive construal of ἐξέστη in Mark 3:21 is the most likely one. Beyond the grammatical and lexical issues that have been recounted, the greatest evidence for construing this verb positively is its literary context, both within the Gospel itself and its Synoptic parallels. No word stands in isolation, but the semantics of a particular word heavily depends upon that to which it stands in relationship. Moises Silva writes that “The principle of contextual interpretation is, at least in theory, one of the few universally accepted hermeneutical guidelines, even though the consistent application of the principle is a notoriously difficult enterprise.”

Certainly, there is a long scholarly history of viewing this verb with a negative connotation. But the context of this verb within its verse,

57 BDAG, s.v. “κρατέω.”
58 The only exception that I can find is Best, “Mark III,” 312. However, he sees this as impossible because of the presumed negative meaning of ἐξέστη.
60 An exception to reading ἐξέστη negatively is Steinmueller, “Exegetical Notes,” 357–58. I have been unable to find an adequate rejoinder to this aspect of his thesis. Perhaps the brevity of his work is the reason it has garnered little attention. Where I
chapter, book, and collection of Synoptic Gospels provides the strongest evidence to view ἔξεστη, and thus the entire verse, in a new light. The positive reading reframes the verse in a readable fashion. It clarifies the word play between Mark 3:21–22 and 3:24–26. It expands upon Mark’s emphases of the crowd, miracles, and the household of Jesus. It comports with the parallels we find in Matthew and Luke. The positive reading of ἔξεστη provides a solid foundation upon which we may more clearly interpret the broader frames within which it is found.

In conclusion, my reading of Mark 3:21 offers a new perspective of a verse that has long frustrated scholars. Yet, in light of some of the earliest, Eastern witnesses and interpreters of this text, my reading is not so innovative. Accordingly, we can look to Jerome as the likely origin of the majority reading of Mark 3:21, an interpretation that became dominant, which later scholars have taken for granted. In stating this, I do not wish to diminish Jerome’s authority, but I do wish to acknowledge that even Jerome is captive to the larger tradition of New Testament interpretation. I hope that the preceding analysis yields hermeneutical fruit to enrich this great tradition.

disagree with Steinmueller is his decision to specify the disciples as the subject of ἔλεγον and the crowd as the subject of ἔξεστη in his translation.
The Ransom Saying (Matt 20:28): A Fresh Perspective

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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5 Barrett, “Background,” 12.
7 Hooker, “Use of Isaiah 53,” 94.
8 Hooker, “Use of Isaiah 53,” 98.
10 Hooker, “Use of Isaiah 53,” 100.
Her argumentation, however, did not account for first century Jewish rules of interpretation. Hillel the elder posited seven rules of Midrash, the last of which specifically states that the entire context is implied when a statement is quoted or implied. Matthew’s audience would have probably been familiar with this passage since it explicates the hope of restoration to Jews in exile. This hope would have resonated with both Jesus’s and Matthew’s audiences who were primarily Jews similarly under the oppression of gentiles. Both Hooker and Barrett have been criticized by scholars for their isolated treatment of texts that bolster their rejection of Isa 53 as a potential background for the ransom saying.

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

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


14 Dunn, Jesus Remembered, 816–18.

15 Dunn, Jesus Remembered, 817.
Werner Grimm agreed with the linguistic arguments of Barrett and Hooker and so asserted that Isa 43:3–4 was the primary background for the ransom saying. In contrast to Isa 53, Grimm argued that Isa 43:3–4 and Prov 21:18 have many linguistic parallels with the ransom saying. He noted that in Rabbinic writings, Ps 49:8, which declares that a ransom will be paid for the gentiles, and Isa 43:3–4, which proclaims that a ransom will be paid for the Jews, are interpreted together to assert that God will ransom everybody.16 Grimm contended that in the Gospels these twin concepts are represented by Matt 16:26//Mark 8:37 and Matt 20:28//Mark 10:45.17

This view was echoed by Volker Hampel, who substantiated the primacy of Isa 43:3–4 by arguing for a contextual connection between Isa 43:5–7 and Matt 8:11.18 He viewed the linguistic and contextual evidence for Isa 43:3–4 to be stronger than that of Isa 53. Likewise, John Nolland prefers Isa 43:3–4 to Isa 53 because of the greater linguistic parallels and wonders whether the plea of Eleazar to God to allow his sacrifice and that of the soldiers to suffice for the salvation of the people in 4 Macc 6:27–29 might also be relevant.19

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

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


with Isa 51–53. He interpreted the ransom saying through the cultic understanding of Jesus expressed by the cleansing of the temple and the last supper. Stuhlmacher’s insistence on the incorporation of Isa 43:3–4 into the interpretation of Isa 53 derives from his contention that λύτρων in Mark 10:45 corresponds to כפר from Isa 43:3 rather than אשם found in Isa 53:10.

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

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


25 Pitre, Jesus, 417.

martyrs as viable backgrounds of the ransom saying in order to establish the legitimacy of Isa 53.\(^{27}\)

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

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

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\(^{27}\) Watts, “Jesus’s Death,” 140–47.


saying appears to reflect the cultic sense of λύτρον that is found in Isa 53.30

The Purpose and Method of This Study

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

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

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

30 France contends, “Even if no linguistic echo were established, δέναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον αὐτὶ πολλῶν is a perfect summary of the central theme of Isaiah 53, that of a vicarious and redeeming death” (“Servant,” 36).
The Socio-Historical Context of \( \Lambda \upiota r\theta o\nu \)

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

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

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

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

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\(^{31}\) F. Büchsel, “\( \lambda \upiota r\theta o\nu \),” TDNT 4:340.

\(^{32}\) Büchsel, “\( \lambda \upiota r\theta o\nu \),” 4:340.

\(^{33}\) Büchsel, “\( \lambda \upiota r\theta o\nu \),” 4:341.
temple treasury.\textsuperscript{34} Also, the Rabbis viewed λύτρον as a type of expiation, which was closely related to the concept of vicarious suffering of the righteous.\textsuperscript{35}

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

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

\textsuperscript{34} Josephus, \textit{Ant.} 6.56–59.
\textsuperscript{35} Büchsel, “Λύτρον,” 4:341.
\textsuperscript{36} Collins, “Signification,” 375–76.
\textsuperscript{37} Collins, “Signification,” 376.
\textsuperscript{38} Collins, “Signification,” 377.
\textsuperscript{39} Collins cites two inscriptions that imply that one is released from captivity or prison upon payment, although there is some debate concerning whether the imprisonment is literal or physical. One seems to imply that a slave was held prisoner in the temple itself (“Signification,” 378).
communicated that the gods were masters and the people were inferiors.

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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45 Bauer and Traina, Inductive Bible Study, 79.
but he also presents additional material that elucidates these themes more explicitly.

The Son of Man

The inclusion of the Son of Man title as a self-referent for Jesus has puzzled commentators for centuries.\(^4^6\) The term “Son of Man” is mentioned extensively in the Gospels (thirty times in Matthew) and every reference is attributed to Jesus. This is significant because throughout the Gospel people refer to him by various titles and names but never as Son of Man. In addition, Son of Man is used as a title for Jesus outside the Gospels only in Acts 7:56.

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

Early Jewish interpretations of the son of man figure were Messianic and assumed that it referred to an individual rather than a collective entity.\(^4^7\) This is especially evident in the Similitudes of Enoch where a figure distinct from the Ancient of Days is called “messiah” whose “name was named before creation” (46:1; 48:3, 10; 52:4). Similarly, 4 Ezra 13:26 envisions a messianic figure who is distinct from God, yet, preexistent. Christians generally identified the son of man

\(^{4^6}\) For a survey of this debate, see Delbert Burkett, The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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

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

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

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

Matthew further develops the connection between Jesus and the Danielic son of man by including imagery from Dan 7 in Jesus’s sayings. For example, Jesus encourages the disciples with the promise of reward when the Son of Man returns in glory with the angels (Matt 16:28; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 13–14). Later, Jesus promises a day when he will
come on the clouds with power and glory (Matt 24:30–31; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 27). Matthew borrows these passages from Mark to elucidate the connection but he also inserts additional material to further emphasize this theme. He adds two lengthy parables about the Kingdom of Heaven that end with the Son of Man commanding angels to execute judgment on the people (Matt 13:37–43; 25:14–46; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 13–14, 26–27). In the latter of these, the Son of Man comes in glory with angels and sits on a glorious throne (Matt 25:31; cf. Dan 7:9–10). Matthew also includes a passage just prior to the ransom saying that promises the disciples will sit with the Son of Man on glorious thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:29–30; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 26–27). The vivid imagery in these passages contributes to the reader’s understanding that although the crowds, Jewish leaders, and disciples do not yet understand, Jesus is the Danielic Son of Man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Suffering Servant

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

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

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


\(^{54}\) Awabdy and Long, “Mark's Inclusion,” 244.

\(^{55}\) For a presentation of these differing positions, see Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 7–8; Watts, *Isaiah*, 70.

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

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

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

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

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57 Watts, Isaiah, 114.
58 John H. Walton provides a helpful summation of the difficulty of identifying the suffering servant in Isaiah (“The Imagery of the Substitute King Ritual in Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song,” JBL 122 [2003]: 734–43, 734).
61 Mark 1:3/Matt 3:2; cf. Isa 40:3.
pouring out of wine to the pouring out of his blood,⁶⁴ (3) remains silent before his accusers,⁶⁵ and (4) is brought to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.⁶⁶

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

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

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

⁶⁷ Jack Dean Kingsbury argues that the suffering servant is a minor theme that, because of parallels between Matt 12:14–21 and passages concerning the Son of God in Matthew, should be viewed as a further reference to the Son of God (Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991], 94–96). While the merits of this theory can be debated, the fact remains that the suffering servant is a significant theme in Matthew.
larger section and the immediate context to elucidate the meaning of the ransom saying within the larger setting of the literary work.68

The Segment Context of the Ransom Saying

The ransom saying in Matthew is situated in the larger section of 16:21–20:34.69 Matthew 16:21 introduces a new theme in the book: Jesus is going to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and be raised again. The verse is introduced with a formula that alerts the reader to a shift in focus of the narrative (ἀπὸ τότε ἐρξατο; cf. Matt 4:17) and anticipates Jesus’s journey in Matt 16:21–20:34 where he travels from Caesarea Philippi through Galilee to Capernaum and various parts of Judea, including Jericho, where he will soon leave to enter Jerusalem (cf. Matt 16:13; 17:22, 24; 19:1; 20:29–34; 21:1).

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

The Immediate Context of the Ransom Saying

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

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

73 Barrett acknowledges that “The real crux of the problem is the use of the title Son of Man” (“Background,” 8).
ransom saying, which helps the reader to recognize the theme of Jesus’s suffering and death throughout the passage.74

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

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

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

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

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

76 France, Matthew, 757.
Jerusalem, which is the very place they are going. The irony of their misunderstanding is made palpable by Matthew when Jesus is nailed to the cross between two thieves, with one on his right hand and one on his left (εἷς ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ εἷς ἐκ ἕως ἐξωύμων) (Matt 27:38).

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

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

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

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

78 France, Matthew, 758.
and his people (Matt 20:23). The economic system of the ancient world was based on patron/client relationships with brokers working between them. The fact that God alone has authority to dictate who sits on the right and left of Jesus contributes to the perception that the Father is the ultimate patron of the world and faithful people are his clients (Matt 20:22). As such, readers in the ancient world would recognize that Matthew portrays Jesus as God’s broker who works on behalf of both his patron and clients to ensure a beneficial relationship for both parties. Jesus’s healings and teachings demonstrate that he has “a spectacular credit rating” with the clients. In this way Jesus fills the role of an intermediary between God and people throughout Matthew.

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

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

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81 Batten, “Brokerage,” 172.
kingdom. He first acknowledges the expected roles of status and power in the Gentile world in a general way and then uses that gnomic example as a foil for the kingdom expectations that he requires (Matt 20:25–27). In Matthew, as opposed to Mark, the contrast between the gentiles and Jesus’s expectations is presented as emphatically as possible; he states what the gentiles do and then without any conjunction states what the disciples should do. This use of asyndeton denotes discontinuity between the first element and the second element since Jesus rejects the example of the gentiles in his explanation.

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

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

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

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

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

In addition, the ransom saying is not entirely devoid of linguistic parallels. Scholars have noted the absence of λύτρον in Isa 53:12, but the LXX rendering of παρεδόθη εἰς δάνατον ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ in the same verse recalls Jesus’s reminder to his disciples that he will be handed
over (παραδίδωμι) to the religious authorities and the gentiles (Matt 20:18–19). Furthermore, the suffering servant is said to bear the sins of many (αὐτὸς ἁμαρτίας πολλῶν ἀνήγεγκεν) (cf. Matt 8:17), which provides a basis for Jesus giving his life for many (πολλῶν) to provide forgiveness for sins (Matt 26:28).

Conclusion

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

Howard Tillman Kuist

The purpose of this study has been to bring together somewhat more fully than can be easily found elsewhere the material for making an estimate of St. Paul from a pedagogical standpoint. Having gathered this material, an evaluation of it is now in order. This evaluation will at least approximate for us what place should be assigned to St. Paul in educational history.

This raises the question: What place has been given to him in the history of education? The answer is a brief one: He has been recognized as a pupil of the celebrated Gamaliel;\(^1\) as the second founder of the Christian Church;\(^2\) as one of the leaders who “did much good, not only in building up the Church but also in promoting education, the chief handmaid of the church.”\(^3\) In a word no definite place has been given him. Perhaps the reason for this is that “the complex environment of his time, and the not less complex ideas which his fertile and subtle mind expressed, have, it would seem, disguised from many readers the real Paul.”\(^4\) On the other hand men have been so interested in his teachings that they have missed the pedagogy of the teacher. St. Paul did not display his art. “The Ideal teacher must have a readiness to be forgotten. And what is harder? . . .

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A teacher does not live [147] for himself but for his pupil and for the truth that he imparts.” In this sense, St. Paul is an Ideal teacher. Consequently, those interested in St. Paul's teachings have failed to sense his significance as a teacher, while those interested in education have not recognized the pedagogy latent in his teachings.

This study made entirely from the pedagogical point of view would be incomplete without a pedagogical evaluation.

1. St. Paul's pedagogy was effective both immediately and permanently. His pedagogy influenced not only a large circle of intimate associates but embraced the bounds of the Roman Empire. Contemporary leaders paid him the unprecedented tribute that he had “turned the world upside down.” His influence is also permanent. A religion born on Oriental soil was projected by his pedagogy into Europe, thus uniting the Orient and the Occident, and consequently pre-determining the history of Europe for all these centuries. Next to the Master Teacher his influence is paramount on early Christian education. He made explicit in his teachings what the Master Teacher had made implicit by his life. His pedagogy is preserved in a literature written by himself, in the current language of the people, a literature which is unequaled by any other except that of which it is a part (the Scriptures). His words have a perennial potency. Under his tuition Augustine, Luther, Wesley came to their own and moved the world. Whenever men today sit at his feet and consider him seriously, something happens. His pedagogy not only spans the centuries, it girds the globe. His teachings, together with those of the Master Teacher, influence more people to-day than any other world teacher who ever lived.

2. St. Paul practiced many things which modern [148] educators preach. He did spontaneously and naturally what we seek so studiously to embody. He employed the pedagogic arts so effectively both in discourse and discussion that many besought and followed him with

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glad and eager hearts. Yet, his art, like Socrates’, had a blemish. He used the leading question to interrogate his pupil and bring him to his viewpoint. He did not seek to inform the intellect for its own sake, but to move to action. Yet, his pedagogy was directed to the mind in his appeals, which won interest and captured attention. He used various means to probe the consciousness of his hearers, appealing by way of perception, apperception, memory, imagination, judgment, and reason. He tapped the springs of feeling by words and actions, and set streams of worthy acts flowing from their lives by inviting imitation and prompting by suggestion. The ideas he taught found expression in action because they were felt by the pupils. Because he appealed to the whole man he received a response from the whole man. He stands the test of modern standards.

3. St. Paul was an Educator as well as a Teacher. He not only taught well but thought well. His educational views are concerned chiefly with the unit and the foundation of human society: the home and the church. His views of the home are a reflection of Hebrew domestic education intensified by a glowing Christian consciousness. They are unequaled for their completeness and sublimity, although not all his views are accepted by modern pedagogy (e.g., the view of child nature), nor by modern sociology (e.g., the submission of wife to husband). The educational function of the church according to Paul is to call out the whole man to complete living in the supreme adjustment of his personal relation to God and man. As a prisoner of his age he offered no place in the teaching function of the Church to women. While this is a blemish from present standards and practice, yet we may infer what his view would be if he lived today. St. Paul omits reference to school education. This aspect of education receives our chief attention to-day. Yet his manner and methods of teaching find application in school education. The modern world would do well to practice his ideas of home instruction and aim at an achievement of his highly ennobling and practical ideals. St. Paul forgot neither man’s social obligation nor his civic duties. His views in both cases are
distinctly pertinent and applicable to present day conditions. (See Chapter V.)

4. His aims as a teacher touched every side of man’s nature, and all of them focused in one unique central aim, an aim which united religion and education toward the realization of complete manhood in this life (and his teachings further indicate, in the life to come), the perfect standard and dynamic of which is Christ. If early Christian Education may be characterized as “other-worldly,” as it is by Graves, this survey of St. Paul’s aims shows that his emphasis at least was not one-sided in this respect. His aim is so all-inclusive that it is in harmony with the combined aims of modern education, and it is so central and focused that it puts the emphasis where the modern emphasis is not, and ought to be. (See Chapter IV.) In this sense, he is a prophet to modern education, and his voice may well be heeded.

5. St. Paul’s qualifications as a teacher emerge from this teaching career. He understood human nature; he knew and embodied what he taught; he had a high conception of the teacher’s function; his physical presence, though possibly weak, was transfigured by a radiant personality; he had an effective voice and a speaking eye; his character is thoroughly human, predominantly positive in quality; his personality was projected by means of a superior mental, emotional, and volitional endowment. These facts give St. Paul a high rating as a teacher in the light of present day standards.\(^7\)

6. St. Paul’s pedagogy was sourced in his training; a training to which his race, his home, his school, and his wider experiences in Tarsus and the Roman world contributed. His traditional Hebrew training with its emphasis on religion and morality, and pedagogic method (although laboriously memoriter) having given him the

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teacher’s background and technique; the cultural influences in Tarsus having awakened in him the teacher’s sense of appreciation; and his contact with the surge of the Roman world having given him the teacher’s vision, he was made finally ready for his mission as a world teacher by transforming his life experience on the road to Damascus. Having been made “free,” he henceforth has been a teacher of nations, the Apostle of Evangelical Freedom and of Justifying Faith.

“Who can calculate the mighty influence of his life upon maxims, upon manners, upon literature, upon history—in short upon the whole development of humanity!”

What then is St. Paul’s place in educational history? Our conclusion follows logically from the facts. He is a world teacher of first rank, an educator of distinction. Therefore, he deserves a conspicuous place in the history of education.
“Except for the LORD”
An Exposition of Psalm 124

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“The trap broke and we escaped”
Ps 124:7 (JPS)

Some of us have been trapped by refractory circumstances at one time or another. Just when we think we most need our freedom, in God’s providence we have been able to say, “The trap broke, and I escaped.”

That’s where we are in today’s text, Psalm 124, where the first words, “Except for the LORD,” give us God, the One who is there, the God of redemption and provision. The psalm also introduces us to the world where we live, a world where there are sides, and itemized threats, and yet, a world where God cares for us faithfully. These are the realities that will occupy us as we open ourselves to the Spirit and the Word.

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1 This paper is an exposition of Psalm 124, so you should have the text of that psalm open as you read because the exposition more or less follows the movement of ideas within the psalm, namely: (1) Sides: who are they? (2) Anger: whose and why? (3) Two images: torrent-talk and trap-talk (4) The trap broke (5) Jesus: the trap broke (6) Paul: God is for us.

I preached a much shorter version of this sermon at the daily chapel service at Asbury Theological Seminary, September, 10, 2013, and at the regular public worship of First Presbyterian Church, Fostoria, OH, August 2, 2015.
1. The Sides

First, the text implies that our world has sides. “Except for the LORD,” it says, “who was on our side.”\(^2\) What or who are on those sides?

The English translation, “the LORD was on our side,” goes clear back to the 1500s\(^3\) and has maintained itself right down into the NRSV, but the Hebrew simply says, The LORD was "for us"—lānū. We start there: to whom does “us” refer?

The psalm is addressed to those identified as “us.” “Let Israel now say,” it says. That’s us. We are Israel, the church. We are Jacob, the redeemed who gather in loving loyalty around God’s self-disclosure, around the unveiling of himself at Sinai, around the revelation that comes down from above to guide and shape the people of the covenant. We are those who say, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Exod 19:8; 24:3; JPS). And we are also those who gather around the crucified and risen Christ, that is, Jesus of Nazareth, God-with-us fully God, and God-among-us in full humanity.

And the other party? The text says, God is “for us,” but it also says, “men rose up against us” and “their wrath was kindled against us” (KJV). This seems to be a binary text. Who are these enemies? What is the occasion of their anger?

Now, the Hebrew word conventionally translated “enemies” appears frequently in the Psalms. It’s there in Psalm 3:1, “O LORD, how many are my foes!”—almost the first words of the Psalter—and about a third of the Psalter refers to enemies; it would be no surprise if the 124th were still talking about them.

But the Hebrew here does not say “enemies,” it does not even say “these people” (as does the CEB). It says, ’ādām, which is the OT’s best word for “a human being” and for “all people, humanity.”

\(^2\) All translations are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.

\(^3\) My reference is to Miles Coverdale and his 1535 translation.
It is a word almost identical to the word for “ground”: Gen 2:5, 7 says that there was no ʾādām to work the ʾādāmā, so, the Lord God formed ʾādām from the dirt of the ʾādāmā. Earlier translations from the PBV through the RSV and NIV just translate it, “men rose up against us.”

How should we understand these words, just here? I understand ʾādām to denote human beings in their linkage with earth. Instead of following the light of the covenant, they only live within natural revelation, a flattened and earthbound dimension. Instead of receiving the gift of truth from beyond themselves, they limit their truth to what they can gather on their own. Instead of trusting in the God of Jacob, maker of heaven and earth, they trust in the son of ʾādām in whom there is no salvation; they die and return to the ʾādāmā and their plans perish.

So, what I would really like to do is translate it this way:

Except for the L ORD who was for us
when Adam rose up against us

Not Adam, the first human being, but Adam as the epitome of humanity who turns away from God, and from the things and people of God. I think of the glib sophistication of 1 Cor 1, the worldly wisdom that Paul sets aside by calling it foolishness. This is a way of living and thinking that is based on what is earthly and human, what is visible, what is of the natural order, existing entirely on its own level, without illumination from outside the material world, without the light of revelation. “Adam” means the world, the ordinary, human way of thinking.

2. Anger: At What?

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4 The term is the subject of the plural verb “swallowed us” (belāʿūnū).  
5 Ps 146:3–4.
So, Adam is angry at Jacob? We feel that hostility in ways large and small. In his book, *A Confession*, Leo Tolstoy writes about his own crisis of faith. He refers to two brothers on a hunting trip who were bedding down for the night. The younger, aged 26, knelt to pray as he had always done. When he had finished and was getting ready to lie down, his older brother said, “So you still do that.” Neither of the brothers ever spoke of it again, but Tolstoy says that the younger man never prayed again, never attended church again. We note how little it takes to dislodge an unexamined faith, but I am also interested in the existence of civilized hostility to Christian faith and practice.

We also see it on the widest scale, already in Scripture. God’s enemies “concoct crafty plans” against his very “own people.” Those enemies say,

> Come on, let’s wipe them out as a nation!
> Let the name Israel be remembered no more!
> Ps 83:3–4 (CEB)

And, we live in a world where people are still saying these words!

### 3. Anger: Why?

And why is the world—or people within our world—still hostile towards God’s people? This psalm does not try to answer that question; it just cites the anger as a fact. I'll give a few suggestions.

(a) Certainly, God’s people have sometimes behaved badly, even rudely, and we should not be surprised if that calls forth an unfriendly response.

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(b) And then, it’s not unusual for resentment to form against excellence, whether it’s physical, intellectual, or moral. An anecdote from the ancient world tells us that on the day that the Athenians were voting whether to expel Aristides the Just from their city, an unlettered man gave his ballot to someone in the marketplace and asked him to write on it the name Aristides. He did not know that he made his request of Aristides himself, who asked him, “What bad thing did he ever do to you?” The man replied, “Nothing. I don’t even know him. But I’m tired of hearing everywhere, ‘the Just, the Just.’”

(By the way, Aristides was not a Jew, but he proved the annoying epithet correct by writing his own name on the unlettered man’s ballot.)

The way of discipline and obedience easily provokes resentment. Jesus put it this way: the darkness hates the light (John 3:19–21). We remember how Chesterton says, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”

(c) Scripture puts it even more strongly: there is evil in our world so deep and pervasive as to warrant the identification of an evil being who seeks everywhere that people should turn away from God into pursuit of prideful ways. The New Testament names him the diabolos, that is, the devil. Indeed, 1 John 3:8 notes, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (cf. Rev 20:10).

d) But when you add to moral excellence the belief in God’s unique calling, you raise further the provocation.

This is part of our faith. God called Abraham and his descendants to be part of a long plan and a large design. They are distinct among earth’s peoples from that moment on, not just in self-

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understanding, but also in receiving the knowledge of God and his plan, and in writing down that story and those truths.

He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and rules to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his rules
Ps 147:19–20

We make the same confession about Jesus Christ: in this man, God uniquely unveiled himself, living and teaching among us, and finally dying and rising. There was never such a man and we receive his gifts from him alone.

Herein lies the scandal of particularity with its outrage towards a plan that claims to be unique, which gives rise to disdain and resentment towards the plan—and therefore towards the people who live that life and tell that story. Christians do not hold that God has done nothing in the religious traditions of the world, but that in election, in Scripture, and in the Incarnation, he has gone farther.

This brings us to a second major point, and back to the text.

4. Psalm 124: Two Images

The psalm tells us that God is present with us, even for us—a presence that guards and sustains. It tells us this through two distinct figures expressing threat: catastrophic waters from which we are spared and the trap from which we are not spared. The one figure is massive, superhuman, and random; the other is specific, focused, and designed. The one is a tsunami, the other a sniper. The one sweeps away armies, the other snares a single bird.

Torrent-Talk
Now, this is not a long psalm, but most of it expresses astonishment at something that did not happen. The main verbs of Ps 124:3–6 speak only of conditions contrary to fact (borrowing the language of classical grammar), “they would have swallowed us up alive.” They wanted to, they would have, but they didn’t.

At the heart of this first description are three parallel statements:

the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;
then over us would have gone the raging waters.

That is, we expect the floods to sweep people away together with property, to rise above the place where life and breath can continue, and to come in with irresistible force.

In recent years, we have seen all of this on the television news. Floods sweep cars away; I have even seen a school bus tumbled about by water, and houses lifted and borne away by endless rainfall. The psalm depicts massive and irresistible force. The rollers that engulf are indifferent to their effect, the waters that seethe are beyond control, the rivers that bury are impervious to appeal. These images come from the massive world of brute nature. This is torrent-talk.

I cannot linger long over these figures, which deserve individual exposition. The description here is fearsome and it gives reality to the cliché, “of biblical proportions.”

*Trap-Talk*

And then, these three lines are framed by two others that come from a different sphere of human life, namely, eating food. “Except for the LORD”—the psalm declares—

they would have swallowed us up alive (124:3)
The LORD . . . has not given us as prey to their teeth (124:6)
This figure elucidates the threat expressed by the floods in two ways. First, that threat is not just brute force, it is personal. The figure of chewing and eating brings human beings into the picture. And second, the threat is fatal. You might imagine someone cast up alive on the shore by a fluke of the floods, but no one survives having been chewed and swallowed up. This is trap-talk.

Torrent-talk tells us that God’s people can be mortally threatened by catastrophes that might even wipe them out, that other people are somehow present in those threats, but then it goes beyond this to tell us that God does not allow these disasters totally to take place. All of this would have happened to Israel, “except for the Lord.”

Trap-talk tells us that specific individuals and groups within the people of God can be targeted. This may be fatal as has often happened within the church over the centuries and such believers rejoice to be worthy to suffer for Christ as did Jesus’s earliest followers according to Acts 5:42—“rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (similarly, Matt 5:12; 1 Pet 4:13–14).

The great truth here is that God is committed to the church. He has a stake in it and is committed to seeing it flourish; he protects it. And there are occasions that fit this description—for one, he brings the Hebrews out of Egypt. Without that break, there could have been no formation of a people for God’s own possession—to escape from Pharaoh is that break. Yet, Israel gets no farther than the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s chariots are behind them. The threat is absolute, they are about to be swallowed alive, the seething waters will soon pass over them. All that hope, from Abraham to Moses, will come to nothing.

Except for the Lord.

And so, as Psalm 66:6 puts it, “they passed through the river on foot,” down that long passage, with the sea standing up on both
sides, the fish gazing through the walls like tourists at an aquarium (as in a cartoon I once saw). With their passage complete and Israel secure, the waters return and it is Pharaoh’s soldiers who begin to wash up on the shore. Without God’s intervention there, the whole plan for a people of his own would fail or must take another form.

The church is not just one more human institution. I suppose the conventions of sociology apply to it and it has trouble not taking on the character of the larger society in which it arises and finds its life. But it is also a divine institution: it has arisen through God’s call and as a social organism it is formed in the image of the Holy Trinity. At the exodus, it might have been destroyed in a single cataclysm.

Except for the Lord.

The church has long since—indeed, already within Scripture—become too scattered to be destroyed in a single action such as this, but God will protect the plan and ensure that the church survives. He will keep it from obliteration in critical circumstances.

5. The Trap

Israel’s rescue at the Red Sea and similar episodes (e.g., the destruction of Sennacherib’s army in 701 BC in 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37) involve God’s people as a whole or in great numbers and torrent-talk is suitable for threats to the church on a grand scale.

But the psalm moves on from torrent-talk to trap-talk. We can also be targeted. In that case, the trap is the better figure for our world. As Christians, we live a life of continuing exposure to those who do not know or do not choose the ways of revelation; we may even be at risk from them. In fact, Psalm 124:7 speaks twice of the trap, introducing us as much to the continuing history of tenuous interaction with the world as to a history of deliverance.
Trap-talk is about us as specific people within God’s plan and call and the trap is any action that harms us or impedes us from living out the life to which we’re called.

I know that Psalm 124 tells us that we have escaped a trap, but the texts all around it are not optimistic. Psalm 123:3–4, for example, in the last words before our own psalm evokes our fear of derisive language:

Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.”

And Ps 129:1–2, which has the same rhetorical pattern as Ps 124, says:

Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth – let Israel now say – Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me.

From this, we see that the Psalter knows more than any individual psalm.

Not only this, but Paul’s famous passage in Romans 8:35–39 contains not one but two lists of obstacles in our lives as Christians. He mentions seven items, which include things like tribulation, distress, nakedness, peril, and sword. Then, he nails it down with the proof text, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered” (Rom 8:36). And then, he lists ten items, which include things like death, life, height, depth, and ends with “nor anything else in all creation” (Rom 8:38–39). Who can forget that ominous list of obstacles over which God’s love is greater?
Paul denies that any of these can truly stop us, but he does make those lists! God’s determination to maintain the church does not guarantee a life without hardship for believers. It may seem too obvious even to say, but the text says it very clearly: (a) if the torrents don’t arrive—the church is safe; (b) but the trap is there and God’s people are vulnerable. We live between safety and threat.

This fact is deep in Scripture, already in the Old Testament. Worldly kings of both Israel and Judah persecuted the faithful, and the entanglement of religious and political currents brought even prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah into mortal threat. Christian tradition speaks of Isaiah’s martyrdom under the Judean king, Manasseh, and from Scripture itself we know that during most of the last eleven years of Judah’s existence, Jeremiah was in prison. King Zedekiah once called him in for counsel and at the end of the discussion Jeremiah pleaded, “do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, lest I die there” (Jer 37:20).

Judaism has lived out this faithfulness now for many centuries. As Shylock says in Shakespeare’s play, “The Merchant of Venice,” “Sufferance is the badge of all our race.” That word, sufferance, is not a synonym of “suffering,” but means rather, putting up with suffering. This derives from deep commitments of faithfulness to the God of Abraham.

Our text puts us on notice that God calls us, as Israel, to this kind of faithfulness, centered on Scripture and on the person of Christ. I repeat my definition of the trap: any action that harms God’s people or impedes us from living out the life to which we are called. We must ask God to strengthen us to live this life.

The church world in which I grew up even sang about it:

Are there no foes for me to face?

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Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace
to help me on to God?

This is a hymn of Isaac Watts sung to the vigorous classical tune, “Arlington.” Our ancestors’ hymns often possess an extravagant rhetorical force now strange to the repetitiousness of modern praise-and-worship. We learned those words and we sang them.

Sure, I must fight if I would reign.
Increase my courage, Lord.
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
supported by thy word.

6. The Trap Broke

The good news is the miracle of release, which the psalm states as an absolute fact. “We have escaped as a bird from the fowler’s trap.” This is where I started and I affirm that such marvelous deliverance does still happen to God’s people. I believe it even when I cannot lead you through the philosophical thickets of causation and coincidence that spring up; and I believe it even when it does not happen exactly when or how we want. Release from threat is part of the hope that sustains us throughout the days and nights of faith and testing.

It is now nearly a generation since the Berlin Wall came down and the Cold War ended. That event brought an end to a period that started with the Russian revolution of 1917, during which Christians in the Soviet Union were subject to great oppression. They were among the millions killed or sent to forced labor camps by Lenin and Stalin. The Russian Orthodox Church was a particular target and it is thought that tens of thousands, both clerical and lay were killed. But other groups were also vulnerable and German Lutheran
congregations in Russia came under severe distress. Many wished to leave Russia but permission was hard to get and the suffering was severe. They were in a hostile culture under oppressive circumstances at the mercy of petty bureaucrats, helpless no matter how much they struggled.

One December, a group of about 1,500 of these Russian Lutherans had been camping in the open on the outskirts of Moscow, waiting for permission to leave and go to South America. It finally came and their first stop was Berlin. They were quarantined for a time in unused military quarters where Otto Dibelius, bishop of the church, went to greet them.

Only the drill hall where they were gathered was large enough for them all. It was cold and misty, Dibelius says in his autobiography:

> Everything was grey on grey. The women with their heads swathed in shawls, the boys in their big fur caps and thick woolen scarves, the older men with their beards. All of them serious, their faces marked by years of want. A mute, grey mass.¹⁰

These people had no pastors but lay people of various occupations conducted worship on Sundays. One of them came forward to open the service with words of scripture. He said,

> We are like a bird escaped from the fowler’s trap; the trap broke and we escaped.

A choir sang and Bishop Dibelius preached. During the service he said, “their faces came alive. Joy came into their eyes. The grey

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mass turned into living people . . . open, natural, unspoiled, borne up by a firm, unquestioning faith.”

They had been in the trap for a long time and knew that even now they would still be back in Russia—except for the LORD.

7. Continuing Threat

Sometimes life remains threatening for us and it may seem that the psalm is naive in affirming a miracle of deliverance. But what the psalm may not know, the psalter does. Look only at the opening lines of Psalm 129:1–2 (NRSV):

‘Often have they attacked me from my youth’
–let Israel now say–
‘often have they attacked me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me.’

The identical pattern of “let Israel now say” and the repetition of the assertion brings the two psalms together so that they can inform one another. We know that the suffering may continue but that does not stop us from looking to God for support and even relief. Remember this, what the psalm does not know, the psalter does.

But the psalm does not promise this to everyone—not right now. It just says that everyone should testify using the words of this psalm: “let Israel now say” (Ps 129:1). In the delay, like the Russian Lutherans, we continue to hope for a miracle while we find ways to live the covenant life in spite of the difficulties. Scripture has a long perspective: it looks ahead and knows that we can wait. The divine plan is secure in God’s mind and in the working of his providence.

In such confidence, John Calvin adopted the last words of this psalm as the standing call to worship in the Protestant liturgy that he worked out in Strasbourg, namely,

Our help is in the name of the LORD
who made heaven in earth.

So, with the trap, the question is not, will it happen?—it has happened, for Scripture calls death itself a trap (Ps 18:5). It is the last trap to be sprung and the question is, how and when will God release me? This begins to give the psalm a long look, even into the life to come.

8. Jesus

In his incarnation, God’s Son suffered in the trap as the gospels plainly say. His critics lie in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say (Luke 11:54). The Pharisees and Herodians came to trap him in his talk (Mark 12:13). He even has his own history of close calls. When he read Scripture and spoke in the synagogue of Nazareth, the whole crowd became angry; they rose up and drove him out of town, dragging him to throw him over a cliff. Luke 4:29–30 says only, “But passing through their midst, he went away.” The trap broke and he escaped. Several times in John’s gospel the crowd became angry at Jesus; once they sought to stone him with calls for his arrest, but he always got away.

But in the end, Jesus too went down the way of death. Grey upon grey. Black upon black.

The hours pass into days and the disciples begin talking in the pluperfect tense—“We had hoped.” This was a favorite saying of my

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12 One notes the verb of threat here (ἀνίστημι) as in Psalm 124:2 (ἐπανίστημι).
undergraduate teacher, Dr. Walter Johnson. But on the morning of
the third day when the two Marys come to the tomb, a young man in
a white robe says to them: “He has risen; he is not here. See the place
there they laid him.” The trap broke and he escaped. It’s white upon
white.

9. Paul

And then, when Paul comes to write the final encouraging words
of Rom 8, he starts by evoking Psalm 124. He says, “If God is for us,
who can be against us? (Rom 8:31). With just those words, he almost
undoes the binary force of Psalm 124; so great is the power and the
 glory of God’s continuing plan.

He uses those words—“for us”—three times before he even
stops to take a breath:

If God is for us, who can be against us? (8:31)
[God] gave him up for us all (8:32)
Christ Jesus . . . is at the right hand of God,
who indeed is interceding for us (8:34)

The whole story spills out: God gave up his only Son for us, who is at
God’s right hand interceding for us; nothing in all creation can
separate us from that love of God, delivered to us in Christ Jesus our
Lord.

So then, the Psalm shows us that “God [is] for us” in holding
back the breakers that would obliterate the church and in sustaining
those who walk the covenant ways in places where traps lie hidden.
The apostle shows us that “God [is] for us” in giving up his only Son,
whose resurrection is the guarantee of our release. The “rising up
against us” of Ps 124 and of every threat that follows gives way to the
rising up of the Savior who brings us with him into the realm of light
and freedom. He is now at God’s right hand interceding for us and from His love nothing in all creation can separate us.

We draw hope from these words even as we wait for the trap to break. We entrust ourselves to the Creator knowing that his plans are longer than time and wider than space. From this God we receive help: strength to confess him as Creator, to trust in the divine timing, and to demonstrate patience in waiting.

And the wider hope is also in God. The opening words of the psalm are, “Except for the Lord.” God is the One who is there, the God of redemption and provision, whose presence we know and who sustains us. The closing words are, “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth,” giving us the God of creation who guards his church and sustains his people.

Thanks be to God for his Word!
“If you look carefully at the text of Mark 8, you will notice the author’s use of the structural law of interchange leading up to the Great Confession.” Bob Traina’s perspicacious tone enveloped the silence of the room. It was becoming clear to each of us that day that the enigmatic story of the blind man who saw people as trees (Mark 8:22–26) held the clue to the substance of Mark’s portrayal of the disciples’ crises of faith articulated in the opening verses of the chapter, which was intensified in 8:14–21 and which culminated in 8:27–29.

Three years prior, I had been accosted in the quadrangle of my alma mater, the Queen’s University of Belfast, by an arrogant law student. “I understand you are a Christian,” he interposed. As President of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship chapter, I was evidently a target for atheistic traffickers on the University campus. “Explain to me,” he continued, “why anyone would want to follow a savior who couldn’t get a miracle right the first time.” He left hardly waiting for an answer—none would be forthcoming anyway—with a smug, satisfied grin on his face. I was obviously not the first Jesus follower he had left deflated and taciturn.

He was referring to Mark 8, the only recorded instance of this miracle. Back then the passage was new to me and to all those whom I consulted, whether pastors or lay leaders. No one provided a satisfactory explanation of the enigma of the man who saw people as trees! The Christian world I knew was impotent to ease my dilemma. Disconsolate, I read and re-read the offending verses, felt the
frustration of ignorance, called imprecatory judgments on the gospel writer, and then resigned myself to uncomfortably categorizing the puzzle of the man who had to be touched twice as yet another unresolved biblical conundrum. Time passed and there were other more pressing things to contemplate.

Everything changed that April morning in Dr. Traina’s IBS class in Kentucky. The veil enshrouding the mystery of the man who needed a second touch was torn away. A light went on that would forever dispel the smugness of the quick-witted law student and his minions were I to encounter them once again. I had learned a way of viewing Scripture that would radically transform my understanding. I was provided with a methodological approach utilizing inductive study tools, which would allow me to unlock seemingly inexplicable passages and enhance those more readily comprehensible.

By viewing the gospel contextually and comprehensively, the solution to the enigma became self-evident. By interposing the account of the blind man who needed Christ’s second touch before he could properly see in Mark 8:22–26, between the disciples’ lack of insight in 8:14–21 (Having eyes do you not see?) and Peter’s final recognition in 8:27–29 (You are the Christ), Mark marvelously and strategically communicates a poignant message: evidently the disciples, like the blind man, needed a second touch to enable them to see clearly, to recognize who Jesus really was.

That was a beginning point. The methodological approach of Inductive Biblical Studies continued to expand my horizons, ubiquitous in its application to view the text through new eyes, to uncover new realities that had laid in unintentional seclusion from the authors’ intent under the inspiration of God’s Spirit.

So, after graduation, I was ready to test the efficacy of the IBS method I had learned from Professor Traina in a wider academic setting. I attended the University of Edinburgh and completed a PhD degree in Old Testament studies. With the citation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle of Irish descent ringing in my ears: “You see, but you do not observe” (from “A Scandal in Bohemia,” 1891), my youthful enthusiasm propelled me to undertake what I hoped would be a groundbreaking perspective of the book of Exodus. In particular, it
was my desire to expose a second, more subtle and overlooked exodus event in the latter section of the book allowing me to conclude that the second book in the Bible contains not one but, in actuality, two exodus events: one from the threat of genocide by an Egyptian pharaoh, the second by divine fiat.

Obviously, the incident after which the book is named occupies the major portion of the material in the book dramatically portrayed in the first eighteen chapters. The occurrences at Sinai occupy the latter portion of the book outlining the giving of the law and the building of the tabernacle. And yet, interposed amid the seemingly innocuous and rather mundane litany of requirements, the narrative of the golden calf emerges in ostensible disconnection.

However, as the IBS method insists, the job of the biblical exegete is to examine the complex intricacies of the text with the framework of the book-as-a-whole, to discern the context in which a writer or redactor has placed a particular pericope, and to determine why it was included and how it functions within that context. So, in scrutinizing and contextualizing the perplexing placement of the story of the golden calf and harnessing the inductive tools I had been trained to use, I advanced the idea of another, underrated exodus event.

Exodus 32 functions as much more than an isolated story recalling happenings in the unfolding history of a fledging nation. The author intentionally placed it within the context of a story of deliverance for a reason. It behooves the scholar to uncover the rationality of its deployment. By relying on the structural relationships used by the author or redactor, it is possible to discern similarities between the “main” exodus event and its subsidiary, which is no less real. Indeed, even though only three chapters are given to the description of the golden calf and the consequences emerging from its worship compared to the much lengthier portion of the book provided for the departure from Egypt, the threat of genocide is more far-reaching in its repercussion. The Abrahamic nation would cease to exist as such. Its almost complete annihilation reflects the seriousness of God’s dismay on Israel’s apostasy.
This innovative approach to understanding the message, in this case of Exodus, was never fully embraced by the old liberal perspective of Wellhausen’s textual dissection pervasive in Europe at the time, but it struck a chord with Brevard Childs at Yale and F. F. Bruce in Manchester, England. I am particularly indebted to Professor Childs whose insights were accommodating and whose encouragement was boundless. Emerging from the research I completed at Yale and at the University of Edinburgh was a profound sense of gratification and ultimate vindication of the IBS method through the external examination of my thesis by F. F. Bruce. The inductive, contextual study had stood the test of rigorous academic study on both sides of the Atlantic. It was time to popularize its application within the wider church.

Traina’s insistence on detailed and exhaustive observation has always been the hallmark and foundational core of the IBS approach. Sadly, it may be the most neglected facet of the hermeneutical endeavor. Understandably everyone wants to interpret the text, to gain a sense of a passage, to answer the question, “What is the meaning of what is here?” The problem is a complete neglect of the a priori consideration from which the interpretive question arises: simply, “What is here?”

In other words, how can one reasonably justify answering the interpretive question, “what is the meaning of what is here” before reaching the prior logical supposition of “what is here” in the first instance? The interpretive question rests on what has been observed. But it is precisely here at the level of thorough observation that most attempts at understanding the text go astray. As such, exhaustive analysis of the biblical material is paramount if one is to fully grasp the message of the Bible.

Eventually, my parish ministry took me to Virginia, Texas and California. Heavy on my heart lay not only the task of sound teaching but of inspiring the Church to delve into Scripture for themselves to discover its profound truths. I reasoned with the people placed in my charge that if God does actually exist and is best defined by Judeo-Christian theology, and if the Bible truly is the word of God addressing the plight of broken humanity—if one really believes that
to be the case, more than a rote affirmation of faith—then to understand the Bible aright must be the most vital undertaking in the world and the most important activity in which humankind can engage. If this is what Almighty God is communicating to His creation, it behooves us to expend every effort to comprehend what is being disclosed and to act upon its message.

When, as a young preacher in Virginia, I asked my congregation to turn to a reference in the book of Zephaniah and perceived puzzling frowns as a result, I was provoked to systematically begin a midweek class on inductive Bible study. A dozen people attended the classes formulated in specific twelve 10-week courses of study covering Old and New Testaments. Each class lasted two hours. There were daily assignments during the entire 10-week sessions and an examination at the end of the course with an attendant certificate of completion when the requirements of the course were fulfilled. We made do with study guides already on the market but which were rather paltry in their attempts to analyze every biblical book in three component parts. Arguably they were better than nothing and little else was available at the time.

Once the disconnect between the content of the study guides and the conclusions reached inductively by the class was blatantly obvious, it became necessary to produce our own material. Over the next twenty years as parishes changed and the material was repeatedly revised, the study guides took on new analytical life and the dozen faithful attendees swelled in number to over 700 participants who met each Wednesday evening in the sanctuary of Hollywood Presbyterian Church where I was serving as senior pastor.

It seemed that a latent appetite had been awakened among many people who simply wanted to engage in a journey of discovery of God’s Word. They came from all over the Los Angeles basin, from a wide spectrum of denominations, including agnostics and people no longer interested in “church” per se but willing to encounter the presumed message of God. They came with their multifarious, preconceived notions and their varied cultural backgrounds but also with searching hearts and a genuine openness to hear afresh the timeless message of the Bible. They came by the hundreds such that
our large community centre could not contain them, which forced the class into the vacuous sanctuary.

For the six-year duration of the study, every book in the Bible lay exposed to the scrutiny of IBS methodology. It was gratifying to see Christians reveling in a study of the source documents of their own faith through detection: observing biblical books as wholes and discerning structural relationships within a book’s component parts. By simplifying and facilitating techniques of study, it was encouraging to witness so many overcome their unease of reading the Bible for themselves.

The success of IBS within the context of a local congregation prompted unanticipated expansion. Truth to tell, I could not have foreseen the overwhelming response our study elicited. After all, the unpretentious idea was merely to help interested people find their way to the book of Zephaniah! What transpired was beyond imagination. So, perhaps it was inevitable that other entities at home and abroad, churches, missions and institutions enquired how they might replicate what was being done in Texas and California.

Like the mustard seed in Jesus’ parable, what began in the most inauspicious manner gave way to a mission movement that we called “The Word Is Out.” This ministry now operates in one form or another in twelve countries throughout the world. Its first Centre for Biblical Understanding is now flourishing in Lusaka. All of it was prompted by the arrogance of an atheistic law student in Ireland, inspired by an IBS professor in America, and sourced by the story of a blind man in Mark’s gospel who needed a second touch from Jesus to see clearly. I am immensely grateful for that second touch!