

The Salvific Significance of Torah and Jesus's Death as a Ransom for Many in Mark's Narrative World

John Van Maaren

Ruprecht-Karls-Universität | john.r.vanmaaren@gmail.com

JJMJS No. 11 (2024): 53–75

Abstract

This article considers the interrelation between law, faith, and the death of Jesus for kingdom entrance in Mark's narrative world. It first argues for a consistently positive portrayal of Torah throughout a Markan narrative that depicts righteous persons as law observant (15:42–43; 16:1), where law-breaking occasions rebuke (6:18; 7:8–9), in which the appropriate response to Jesus's miracles includes doing "what Moses commanded" (1:44), and where law observance is the standard for kingdom entrance (10:17–22; 12:28–34). It then draws on insights from the role of Torah in the Gospel of Matthew (especially, Runesson 2016; Eubank 2013) and Luke (Giambrone 2017), to consider the relationship between law observance as a kingdom membership criterion and the death of Jesus "as a ransom for many" (10:45) in Mark. It concludes that Mark's echoes of the new exodus theme suggest Jesus's death serves to pay the ransom for the ancestral sins that scattered Israel among the nations, and so prepare the way for the gathering of his elect from the four winds (13:27) into the imminent kingdom of God.

Keywords

Soteriology, Torah, Faith, Intertextuality, Within Judaism

1. Introduction¹

While Paul is commonly read to contrast salvation by faith with salvation through works of the law (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:28), the gospels evince no such dichotomy. In contrast, the gospel writers often depict Jesus assuming the necessity of Torah observance for kingdom entrance (e.g., “you know the commandments,” Mark 10:19 // Matt 19:17 // Luke 18:20) while also extoling the virtues of “great faith” (e.g., “Woman, how great is your faith!” Matt 15:28).² Yet, Paul’s purported faith/works dichotomy is too easily projected onto the gospel writers, leading many interpreters to assume that salvation by works generally, or obedience to the Mosaic Torah more specifically, must be antithetical to faith in Christ’s sacrificial death for the writers and therefore inconsequential for kingdom entrance.³ This *a priori* theological framework causes interpreters to either overlook, and sometimes intentionally downplay, the positive portrayal and salvific significance of human actions in many gospel texts. Surprisingly, while human actions are often associated with kingdom membership in the gospels (e.g., the parable of the sheep and the goats, Matt 25:31–46), faith primarily relates to healing in the immediate present (e.g., “daughter, your faith has made you well,” Matt 9:22 // Mark 5:34 // Luke 8:48).⁴

Several recent studies of Matthew and Luke have highlighted the importance of human actions for membership in the kingdom of God—usually

¹ An expanded and slightly reworked version of this article also appears as the sixth chapter of John Van Maaren, *The Gospel of Mark’s Judaism and the Death of Christ as Ransom for Many* (WUNT I; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025).

² This observation is noted in the most recent Markan commentary. Thomas Söding, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (THZNT 2; Leipzig: Evangelisch Verlagsanstalt, 2022), 208–209.

³ For example, with explicit appeal to Paul, Mar Pérez i Díaz writes, “If we take into account the different texts of Paul presented to show the interest shared by the apostle and the evangelist, we see that the keystone that unites them is to deliver man from the law.” *Mark, a Pauline Theologian* (WUNT 2/521; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 119. Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 555. More moderate positions are reflected in the influential commentaries of Adela Yarbro-Collins and Joel Marcus, who both appeal to Paul in their discussion of law in Mark as unnecessary for, but not necessarily antithetical to, salvation. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 356; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 74.

⁴ English translations of texts now in the Bible, unless noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version.

designated “salvation,” or “eternal life.” Anthony Giambrone’s examination of the charity theme in Luke notes that “Luke simply accepts the idea that, as sin contracts a debt, so credit accrues for performing good works—even to the point of meriting the resurrection.”⁵ Similarly, Nathan Eubank’s study of Matthew’s economic imagery concludes that “almsgiving is the quintessential—but far from only—act that earns heavenly treasure. One’s ‘account’ with God ... determines whether one enters the kingdom.”⁶ Anders Runesson, while examining the reasons persons incur divine wrath in Matthew, finds that “in Matthew’s gospel, the law of Moses is the foundational criterion that decides various forms of punishments and rewards.”⁷

While Giambrone, Eubank, and Runesson configure the relationship between human action and the death of Jesus differently (discussed below), no study has considered the salvific significance of Torah observance in Mark. The scholarly hesitancy to introduce Mark into this discussion is quite likely due to the widely-held assumption that Mark writes for a primarily non-Jewish audience (e.g., 7:3–4) and portrays Jesus setting aside the Levitical dietary and possibly ritual purity laws (7:1–23). However, the writer’s explanation of the customs of πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (“all the Jews/Judeans,” 7:3–4) admits of other explanations⁸ and a few recent studies have developed and refined a reading of

⁵ *Sacramental Charity, Creditor Christology, and the Economy of Salvation in Luke’s Gospel* (WUNT 2/439; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 304.

⁶ *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew’s Gospel* (BZNTW 196; Boston: de Gruyter, 2013), 105.

⁷ *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 170.

⁸ At the narrative level, it appears to explain Judean customs (“all the Judeans”) for a scene taking place in Galilee and could therefore explain local-specific variation for a Judea/Galilee motif. So Daniel Haase, *Jesu Weg zu den Heiden: das geographische Konzept des Markusevangeliums* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 63; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019), 85; Johannes Majoros-Danowski, *Elija im Markusevangelium: ein Buch im Kontext des Judentums* (BWANT 180; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 19; Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark’s Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 105; Gudrun Guttenberger, *Die Gottesvorstellung im Markusevangelium* (BZNTW 123; de Gruyter, 2004), 141. It may also explain Jewish customs for “diaspora Jews far removed from the everyday workings of Palestinian Judaism and with more knowledge of the local Gentile world than the Palestinian Jewish world”: Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark’s Passion: Jesus’ Davidic Suffering* (SNTSMS 142; Cambridge:

Mark 7 in which Jesus argues *in favor of* a Levitical understanding of ritual purity while simply assuming the importance of kashrut.⁹ This reading has the advantage of not making Jesus reject Torah in the very scene where he rebukes his interlocutors' for doing just that ("you reject the commandment [ἐντολήν] of God," 7:8–9). It also raises the possibility that Mark, like Matthew and Luke, assumes that Torah observance matters and that it impacts kingdom membership.

This study seeks to integrate the importance of Torah observance into the understanding of the Markan Jesus's call to repentance as preparation for the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). After a brief survey of Markan indicators of a positive portrayal of the law, and its link with kingdom membership, this study outlines the contributions of Giambrone, Eubanks, and Runesson for the understanding of the salvific mechanisms in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. It then uses insights from these related studies to outline how Mark likely conceived of the relationship between Torah observance and Jesus's death "as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). While the Gospel of Mark does not have Luke's sustained interest in almsgiving (Giambrone), Matthew's extensive economic imagery (Eubank), or a "structured and coherent approach to divine judgment" (Runesson),¹⁰ it does include multiple stories that link eternal life/kingdom entrance with Torah observance (especially, Mark 10:17–22; 12:28–34).

2. The Validity and Salvific Significance of Torah in the Markan Narrative

The law of Moses and specific legislation in the Mosaic law are common topics in the Markan narrative. Most often, elements of the law are the basis for disputes between Jesus and his interlocutors who are often scribes and

Cambridge University Press, 2007), 28. Others have noted the uncharacteristic nature of the comment to suggest that it is a later interpolation. E.g., Marie Sabin, *Reopening the Word: Reading Mark as Theology in the Context of Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7–8.

⁹ Logan Williams, "The Stomach Purifies All Foods': Jesus' Anatomical Argument in Mark 7.18–19," *NTS* 70 (2024): 371–391; John Van Maaren, "Does Mark's Jesus Abrogate Torah? Jesus' Purity Logion and Its Illustration in Mark 7:15–23," *JMJS* 4 (2017): 21–41; Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012); Yair Furstenberg, "Defilement Penetrating the Body: A New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7.15," *NTS* 54 (2008): 176–200.

¹⁰ *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 5.

Pharisees.¹¹ For the sake of brevity, this study makes just two preliminary points: (1) numerous passages in Mark's gospel assume, or state explicitly, the importance and validity of the Mosaic law, and (2) the law is explicitly linked with kingdom membership in at least two passages.¹²

First, throughout the narrative of Mark, law observance is an assumed part of righteousness. This is stated most overtly in Jesus's rebuke of the Pharisees: "you abandon the commandment (τὴν ἐντολήν) of God and hold to human tradition" (7:8; cf. 7:9). This distinction between the command of God and human tradition provides a lens for understanding what Mark assumes for other disputes and discussions of specific laws—that is, Mark presents Jesus as defending the commandments of God against human innovation. The crucial importance of the law that is noted explicitly in Mark 7 coheres with other glimpses into the writer's assumptions about the law. For example, the writer emphasizes that the timing of Joseph of Arimathea's burial of Jesus's body (15:42–43) and that of the three visitors to the tomb (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome; 16:1) is dictated by the need to observe the Sabbath. Elsewhere Jesus commands the healed *lepros* to go to the priest and "offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded"¹³ and John the Baptist rebukes Herod for marrying his brother's wife and thereby violating Lev 18:16 (Mark 6:18). In each of these examples, the writer of Mark assumes that law obedience matters.

¹¹ Specific topics related to the law that are addressed in the Markan narrative include the Sabbath (2:23–3:6; cf. 1:21–39; 15:42–43; 16:1–2), ritual impurity (7:1–23; cf. 1:40–45; 5:21–45), moral impurity (e.g., 6:18; 7:19–23; 10:11–12, 19; 12:5–8), marriage (6:17–20; 10:2–12; 12:18–27), oaths and vows (7:11), temple offerings (1:40–45; 12:28–34), and the decalogue (10:17–20). References or allusions to individual commands of the decalogue occur as follows: First commandment (Exod 20:2): 10:18; 2:29, 32. Sabbath (Exod 20:8–11): 1:21–39; 2:23–28; 3:1–6; 15:42–43. Honor parents (Exod 20:12): 7:10; 10:19. Murder (Exod 20:13): 10:19; cf. 3:4, 6; 6:19; 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; 11:18; 12:5, 7, 8; 13:12; 14:1, 55; 15:7. Adultery (Exod 20:14): 7:21–22; 10:11–12, 19. Stealing (Exod 20:15): 7:21; 10:19. False witness (Exod 20:16): 10:19; 14:55–59. Coveting (Exod 20:17): 4:19; 7:22.

¹² The word νόμος ("law") does not occur in Mark, but related terms do; cf. Heikki Sariola, *Markus und Das Gesetz: Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung* (AASF 56; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1990), 18. Related words include ἐντολή ("commandment"): 7:8, 9; 10:5, 19; 12:28, 31; ἔξεστιν ("it is permitted"): 2:24, 26; 3:4; 6:18; 10:2; 12:14; and Μωϋσῆς ("Moses"): 1:44; 7:10; 9:4, 5; 10:3, 4; 12:19, 26.

¹³ Mark 1:44. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 210, writes, "By this instruction Jesus seems to acknowledge the authority of the priestly establishment."

Second, correct understanding and correct practice of the law are both closely tied with membership in the kingdom of God. Arseny Ermakov pointed this out in a short essay and here I rely on his discussion.¹⁴ On the one hand, the law must be understood correctly in order to enter the kingdom of God. This is most clear when a scribe questions Jesus about the greatest commandment (ἐντολή πρώτη) in the law (12:28–34). After the scribe agrees with Jesus’s dual answers of the love of God (Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41) and love of neighbour (Lev 19:18) and proceeds to favorably compare these to “all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (12:28–33), Jesus responds “you are not far from the kingdom of God” (12:34). Right understanding of the law is, according to this story, an important part of entrance into the kingdom. While some commentators read the scribe’s answer to imply the abrogation of sacrifice,¹⁵ the comparative language (i.e., “greatest commandment,” “more important”) and the allusions to 1 Kgdms 15:22 and Hos 6:6 which both assume the continued importance of sacrifice, suggest that the writer of the Markan narrative also assumes the continued validity of sacrifice.¹⁶

On the other hand, the law must be obeyed to enter the kingdom of God. This is most clear in Jesus’s answer to the man’s question about what he must do to gain eternal life (10:17–22), a context that is explicitly concerned with kingdom entrance. Jesus’s response to the man’s inquiry is to remind him of the commandments he already knows: “you know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother’” (10:19). The implication is that eternal life—identical with entrance into the kingdom of God (10:17, 24, 25)—is attained by observing the commandments. After the man states that he keeps these, Jesus replies “you lack one thing”

¹⁴ “The Salvific Significance of the Torah in Mark 10.17–22 and 12.28–34,” in *The Torah in the New Testament: Papers Delivered at the Manchester-Lausanne Seminary of June 2008*, ed. Michael Tait and Peter Oakes (LNTS 401; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 21–31.

¹⁵ Morna Hooker, *Mark*, 289, concludes the phrase would have been understood as a condemnation of temple worship, but only because of an assumed context where the writer and readers did not offer sacrifice. Cf., Günther Bornkamm, “Das Doppelgebot der Liebe,” in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Walther Eltester, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1957), 85–93, esp., 85, 89–90; Cuvillier, *Marc*, 254.

¹⁶ Adela Collins, *Mark*, 576, writes, “That does not mean that cultic sacrifices do not need to be made, or still less that they ought to be abolished.” Similarly, Markus, *Mark 8–16*, 842.

(10:21) and directs him to give his wealth to the poor in exchange for eternal life. When Paul's faith/works dichotomy is read into Mark, this is commonly seen as an addition to law observance and indicative of a different standard of righteousness.¹⁷ Yet Jesus's directive is comprehensible as pointing out one commandment that the man has not kept: "love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁸ Later in the Markan narrative Jesus identifies the love of neighbor as one of the two most important commands in the law (12:31) and this man's accumulation of "many possessions" (10:22) and apparent disregard for the poor (10:21) is a clear transgression of Lev 19:18.¹⁹ If this background is correct, Jesus's instruction to the man to sell his possessions is aimed at bringing the man back into obedience with Lev 19:18. There is abundant evidence that Jews in antiquity often associated giving to the poor (almsgiving) with eternal rewards.²⁰ The logic throughout the passage is that living according to God's law given to Moses is the standard of righteousness and necessary for entrance into the kingdom of God/eternal life.

In contrast to the law of Moses, faith is never presented as a criterion for kingdom entrance in Mark's gospel. When faith "saves" (σώζειν) in Mark's

¹⁷ For example, Robert H. Gundry, *Mark*, 555, writes, "Jesus upsets the notion that keeping the commandments brings eternal life."

¹⁸ Leviticus 19:18. For a similar conclusion regarding Matthew's version, see Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 124–126.

¹⁹ Michael Peppard makes a related argument that the one command the man failed to keep was "do not defraud" (Mark 10:19). He points out that this is the only commandment listed by Jesus that is not part of the decalogue (it occurs twice in Torah: Deut 24:14–15; Lev 19:13); "Torah for the Man Who Has Everything: 'Do Not Defraud' in Mark 10:19," *JBL* 134 (2015): 595–604, esp. 599–600. Peppard argues that an analysis of the ways a person could become wealthy in the first century suggest that the command "do not defraud" is meant as a critique of the man's wealth. In a zero-sum economy with land as the scarcest resource, it was primarily landowners who, through exploiting workers, could gain wealth. Richard A. Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), esp., 89; Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O.C. Dean Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 15–20. If this background is correct, Jesus's instruction to the man to sell his possessions is aimed at bringing the man back into obedience with Deut 24:15/Lev 19:13 so that he in fact does not incur guilt (Deut 24:15). Peppard's conclusion, like that suggested here, would make law observance the criterion of righteousness that Jesus demands of the man.

²⁰ E.g., Prov 10:2; Hos 6:6; Dan 4:24; Tob 4:5–11; Sir 21:9–13. Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 144–146.

gospel (5:29; 34; 10:52), it saves from sickness, not from the destruction that awaits those outside the kingdom of God (e.g., 9:42–48). In these contexts, faith saves a person from their physical ailment in the sense that Hippocrates can speak of persons being saved (σώζειν), for example, from a fever or extreme fatigue (*Coan Prenotions*, 135, 136). In fact, the πίστις, πιστεύω, πιστικός lexeme most often represents the human posture that enables healing, exorcism, and other miraculous acts in the immediate present. Faith is explicitly noted as the key human prerequisite for healing in relation to the four persons carrying the paralytic (2:5), the woman with a flow of blood (5:34), the synagogue ruler and his daughter (5:36), the father of an epileptic son (9:23–24), and the blind Bartimaeus (10:52). Similarly, faith, or lack of faith, in Jesus’s miraculous power is associated with the calming of the sea (4:40) as well as the withering of the fig tree and the associated teaching on petitionary prayer (11:22–24). Elsewhere the faith lexeme generally designates confidence that what someone says is true: the chief priests, scribes, and elders should have believed John the Baptist (11:31) and the disciples are not to believe every announcement that the Messiah is here (13:21). This sense of believing what someone says is true also seems to be the meaning in the introductory summary of Jesus’s proclamation: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe (πιστεύετε) in the good news” (1:15)—that is, accept the truth of Jesus’s proclamation that the kingdom of God is near. In Mark’s logic, acceptance of Jesus’s message is not the end goal, but should prompt repentance (μετανοεῖτε; 1:15) from sin (2:17) which for Mark, as argued above, consists of disobeying the commandments of God (e.g., 7:8–9). By association, confidence in the truth of someone’s teaching also seems to be the sense of references to faith in Jesus, whether children who believe (πιστευόντων; 9:42), or chief priests and scribes who mockingly offer to believe if Jesus will come down from the cross (πιστεῦσωμεν; 15:32). If faith in Jesus designates confidence in Jesus, lack of faith (ἄπιστις; 9:24) results in fear (4:40; 5:36).

In this sense, then, for Mark’s narrative world, kingdom entrance is based on righteousness, understood as obedience to God’s law given to Moses. Faith’s closest relation to kingdom entrance is that it prompts repentance from sin, bringing persons back into line with the law of God. It is in this sense, then, that we should understand Jesus’s initial proclamation, “the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (1:15), and target audience: “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (2:17).

3. Linking Human Action and Jesus's Self-Sacrificial Death in Matthew and Luke

If the standard of righteousness and criterion for kingdom entrance in the Gospel of Mark is obedience to Torah, why must Mark's Jesus "give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45)? Three studies that consider the relationship between human actions and Jesus's death in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke provide useful comparisons for our study of Mark. I provide brief summaries here before considering the Gospel of Mark.

First, Nathan Eubank's study of the economics of salvation in Matthew considers how Jesus "saves his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21) within Matthew's particular understanding of sin and righteousness.²¹ He builds on Gary Anderson's observation that economic imagery pervades Early Jewish and Christian conceptions of sin and righteousness, and finds that Matthew likewise conceives of sin as debt, and righteous deeds as wages earned (25:29; 6:12, 19–24).²² Eubank addresses human action—never delineated specifically as those actions commanded in Torah, and yet his observation that charity is "the quintessential—but far from only—act that earns heavenly treasure" corresponds closely to law observance as kingdom membership criterion and so can be usefully engaged for comparative purposes.

Eubank finds that, in Matthew's narrative, a person's economic account determines kingdom membership (e.g., parable of the talents, 25:14–30; cf. 24:45–51; 25:31–46) and the coming judgment represents a settling of accounts ("he will repay everyone for what has been done," 16:27). Yet, Matthew presumes the possibility of post-mortem repayment of debts (e.g., parable of the unforgiving servant, 18:23–35; cf. 5:25–26), that one's heavenly wages may be deposited to others' accounts (e.g., "whoever welcomes a prophet ... will receive a prophet's reward," 10:41–42), and that God cancels debts when asked ("forgive us our debts," 6:12; parable of the unforgiving servant, 18:26–27) and repays righteous deeds in excess (20:13–14).²³

The "heart" of Eubank's study is an investigation of how Jesus's role as one who saves from sin (1:21) and gives his life "as a ransom for many" (20:28) functions in light of the above economics of sin as debt and righteousness as good works. He finds a two-fold significance of Jesus's sacrificial death which both (1) provides an example for followers to imitate as they likewise deny

²¹ Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 15.

²² Anderson, *Sin*; Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 3, 25–26, 104–105.

²³ Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 105.

themselves (16:24; 19:29; 20:26), thereby earning heavenly wages (16:25; 19:29), and (2) accrues an excess of credit by which Jesus is able to pay the debt-bondage and save the many (20:28), thereby fulfilling all righteousness (3:15). Accordingly, for Eubank, Jesus both provides a road map for persons to follow in order to earn heavenly wages, and, if they are unable to balance their accounts, Jesus's excess credit may be deposited into the account of any who ask (6:12).

The second study, by Anthony Giambrone, examines the theme of charity in Luke's gospel within the framework of the salvific significance of good works. He, like Eubank, never delineates works as those works commanded by Torah, yet, by rooting his study in Luke's Jewish context, noting that this is done with constant reference to "the law and the prophets," and finding the idea of meriting the resurrection "in continuity with a deeply written Jewish worldview," his category of "works" nicely maps onto Torah observance and may be constructively engaged for our comparative purposes.²⁴ Giambrone, like Eubank, builds on the work of Gary Anderson, but emphasizes Anderson's later work, noting that, in early Jewish and Christian thought, charity is (1) pervasive, (2) positive, and, most significantly, (3) sacramental (i.e., a cultic act with redemptive power).²⁵ He undertakes three "exegetical probes" into Luke's parables—(1) the two debtors (7:36–50), (2) the good Samaritan (10:25–27), and (3) the unjust steward, and Lazarus and the rich man (16:1–31)—to show that Luke accepts the Second Temple idea of sin as debt (7:36–50), that the debt of sin may be repaid by charity (10:25–37; 16:1–8), and that in Luke the two models of salvation (1) by divine intervention (remission) and (2) by a gesture of repentance in the giving of alms (repayment) cohere (16:19–31). At the conclusion of his study, he considers the Lukan relation between the divine and human roles in salvation: God forgives, and people repent through works of charity.²⁶ Giambrone concludes that Luke replaces the Jewish link between charity and cult by linking charity with Christ's sacrificial death in the Lord's supper (22:19), but he refrains from suggesting how Christ's sacrifice may perfect charity or how charity allows participation in Christ's sacrifice.²⁷

Third, Anders Runesson investigates the Matthean theme of divine judgment which, as a key boundary marking strategy for dividing "us" from "them" through criteria for correct behavior, represents an essential element in

²⁴ Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 2, 284, 304.

²⁵ Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 49–51; Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

²⁶ Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 126, 309.

²⁷ Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 313.

understanding “core aspects of the identity and social practices of a religious group.”²⁸ Runesson’s examination of Matthew’s narrative world finds that faith is primarily associated with healing in this world (Roman centurion, 8:10; paralytic, 9:2; woman with a flow of blood, 9:22; two blind men, 9:29; Canaanite woman, 15:28; disciples’ lack of faith, 17:20) but never with judgment and entrance into the world to come.²⁹ Similarly, loyalty to the person of Jesus is not the fundamental criterion for judgment, since persons who do not follow Jesus are promised substantial rewards (10:40–42; 25:31–46) and deemed “righteous” (1:19; 13:17; 23:29, 35) and passages linking Jesus with reward and punishment concern the response to Jesus’s teaching of repentance in light of the expected kingdom.³⁰ In contrast, the law of Moses is explicitly presented as the criterion of judgment (5:17–20; 7:21–27) and assumed to be relevant and consequential in both its entirety (23:23), and specificity.³¹ Accordingly, while faith describes the correct attitude, and Jesus provides its authoritative interpretation, “the law of Moses is the foundational criterion that decides various forms of punishments and rewards” in Matthew’s narrative world.³²

Runesson integrates Jesus’s need to “save his people from their sins” (1:21) and die a sacrificial death (26:28) with Matthew’s stated validity of Torah observance as the basis for punishment and reward through the eight-step logic of Ed Sanders’s “covenantal nomism.”³³ Runesson provides specific examples from Matthew to establish that the writer shares this basic pattern of thought:

[1] God has chosen Israel (1:1, 21; 10:5–6; 15:24, 31) and [2] given the law (5:17–18; 7:12; 19:17; 22:34–39). The law implies both [3] God’s promise to maintain the election (1:21, 23; 2:6; 3:9; 9:12–13; 24:31) and [4] the requirement to obey (3:8–9; 5:20, 48; 7:21–25; 12:50; 13:23; 23:23–28). [5] God rewards obedience and punishes transgression (5:6, 19, 20; 6:1, 18, 33; 12:36–37; 13:41–42; 15:3–9, 13–14; 19:17, 29; 23:33, 35–36;

²⁸ Runesson concludes that the thought-world and social setting reflect a ‘dialect’ of Second Temple Judaism. Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 2, 443.

²⁹ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 136.

³⁰ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 142–163.

³¹ Adultery (5:27–30), divorce (5:31–32; 19:3–9), bloodshed (5:21–22), retribution (5:38–42), honoring father and mother (15:4; 19:19), and greed (19:21–24).

³² *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 163.

³³ Ed P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977), 422.

24:12–13). [6] The law provides for the means of atonement (5:23–24; cf. 23:17–21; 26:28), and atonement results in [7] maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship (26:28). [8] All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement, and God’s mercy belong to the group which will be saved (13:43, 49; 19:7, 26, 29; 24:12–13, 22, 31; 25:21).³⁴

According to Runesson, in Matthew’s narrative world, the mechanism for atonement provided in the law [#6] is not working, because the temple cult has become defiled through the accumulation of grave sins and has reached a breaking point through the sins of leading Pharisees who are also held responsible for ancestral sins (23:29–39). Because of the accumulation of moral impurity, Jesus foresees the temple’s destruction (24:2) and the end of its atoning function in removing the impurity that threatens the land and people, presenting a barrier to kingdom membership. In this context, Jesus’s death takes up the role of atoning for sin that the defiled temple is unable to play, thereby maintaining and re-establishing the covenantal relationship.³⁵ In this logic, Jesus’s death is necessary to maintain the covenantal context within which law observance matters—that is, Jesus had to die because the temple was condemned (rather than vice-versa—that the temple was destroyed as a consequence of Jesus’s death). Runesson notes that, while condemnation and exclusion from the kingdom is based on Torah disobedience, Matthew (unlike Mark 10:29–30 and Luke 18:29–30) never portrays kingdom membership as a reward for Torah observance.³⁶ Rather, for Matthew, persons “inherit” the kingdom (19:29; 25:31–46). In this way, kingdom membership is the default destiny of covenant members (i.e., Israel) unless the covenant is broken.

In summary, Nathan Eubank, Anthony Giambrone, and Anders Runesson configure the mechanism of salvation that includes both human actions and Christ’s self-sacrificial death differently. These differences are partly attributable to the focus on different gospels, but also partly because of different approaches. Eubank’s focus on the *economy* of salvation integrates Christ’s “ransom for many” into the heavenly ledger as the most righteous of deeds that fulfills all righteousness. Giambrone’s starting point is the sacramental/cultic

³⁴ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 199–200.

³⁵ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 91, 163.

³⁶ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 45.

significance of one specific type of human action—charity/almsgiving—as the work of repentance necessary to receive Christ’s forgiveness. Runesson emphasizes the sacrificial element to integrate Christ’s death into a probable first-century Jewish thought world that already had an existing cultic mechanism for dealing with sin.

The above studies provide useful starting points for considering how Mark relates the death of Jesus to Torah observance. It is noteworthy that both Eubank and Giambrone examine motifs that are in some way unique to Matthew and Luke respectively. That is, the texts that Eubank relies upon for Matthew’s understanding of sin as debt and righteousness as wages earned are absent from Mark, with one exception (Matt 10:41–42 // Mark 9:41)³⁷ and each of Giambrone’s “exegetical probes” into Luke’s parables³⁸ are also absent from Mark. Still, hints in Mark’s narrative suggest that Mark, like Matthew, may conceive of sin as debt (Mark 9:41) and at least the Markan Jesus’s directive to the rich man to “sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Mark 10:20) may, like Luke’s narrative, link almsgiving with kingdom entrance. Yet the absence of either a Markan emphasis on sin as debt or an almsgiving motif prevents us from directly examining whether either solution works for Mark’s gospel. Runesson’s study that links Jesus’s death with temple provides a more plausible connection for thinking about Mark, for Mark has a strong temple critique motif.

As we turn to Mark, it is important first to consider the few hints at the significance of Jesus’s death in Mark’s narrative world. Mark provides no extended treatment of the significance of Jesus’s death, and so our treatment does not take the form of a study of a Markan motif, but rather inquires into *possible* ways that the writer of Mark related the significance of Jesus’s death to the stated significance of Torah observance for kingdom entrance in Mark’s gospel.

³⁷ These are “you will not get out until you have paid the last penny (Matt 5:25–26); “forgive us our debts” (Matt 6:12); “he will repay everyone for what he has done” (Matt 16:27); parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23–35); parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1–16); faithful and wicked servants (Matt 24:45–51); parable of the talents (Matt 25:14–30); parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46).

³⁸ These are (1) the two debtors (Luke 7:36–50), (2) the good Samaritan (10:25–27), and (3) the unjust steward, and Lazarus and the rich man (16:1–31).

4. Jesus's Death "as a Ransom for Many" in Mark

4.1 *Setting the Stage: Markan Indicators of the Significance of Jesus's Death*

If we are correct that, for Mark, righteousness (2:17)—understood as Torah observance (12:28–34; 10:17–22)—is the primary criterion for kingdom membership, how does Mark understand the significance of Jesus's death? While Jesus's death is often predicted (8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33; cf. 3:6; 8:34), Mark provides only rare hints at what he sees as its significance. On the one hand, Jesus's death is said to be exemplary: "If any want to follow behind me, let them ... take up their cross and follow me" (8:34). More interestingly, as Jesus approaches Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, he tells of his impending death to illustrate kingdom servant leadership practices for the disciples, noting that he gives his life as "a ransom (λύτρον) for many" (10:45). Similarly, at the last supper, Jesus describes the cup as "my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many" (14:24). The issues, then, that will inform the rest of our investigation are (1) the meaning of "ransom" in Mark 10:45, (2) the relationship between Jesus's death and "covenant" in Mark 14:24, and (3) the identity of the "many" in both texts. As we will see, the answers to each of these questions coalesce around the new exodus motif, understood as the regathering of the descendants of Jacob from the places they have been scattered.

4.2 *Jesus's Death as a Ransom in Mark 10:45*

There is widespread agreement that Deutero-Isaiah's suffering servant is an important background for the Markan Jesus's statement that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (λύτρον) for many" (10:45): both figures are said to (1) serve others and (2) die (3) for the sake of many (Isa 53:11–12 LXX; Mark 10:43–45).³⁹ Yet the absence of explicit ransom language in Isaiah's suffering servant song has caused scholars to look for additional, or sometimes alternative, contexts both elsewhere in Israel's ancestral writings, and in the broader Greco-Roman world. For example, Matthew Thiessen emphasizes the royal connotations of both the narrative foreground ("You know that among the nations [τῶν ἐθνῶν], those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them ... but it is not so among you," Mark 10:43–44) and the "Son of Man" title—derived from Dan 7:14–15—to root the ransom language in the context of Greco-Roman ideals of the self-sacrificial ruler and imperial arguments for the reverse—that many should die for the one

³⁹ Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 753; Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 500.

ruler. Thiessen notes the strong verbal parallels—including ransom language—between Seneca’s argument that it is right that many should die as a ransom on behalf of the emperor Nero (the many for the one) and the Markan Jesus’s statement that he will die as a ransom for many (the one for the many). Thiessen concludes that “[i]n Mark 10:42–45, then, we see an early rulership discourse of the Jesus movement that challenges and rejects the type of rulership advocated by Seneca in *De Clementia*.”⁴⁰

Brant Pitre looks to the use of ransom language in the Hebrew Bible/LXX to find intertextual allusions in Mark 10:45. After surveying the variety of uses of *λυτρώω*; *λύτρον* in the LXX, he makes the important and often overlooked point that “this terminology is . . . most prominently used to describe a very particular type of deliverance: deliverance or release *from exile*.”⁴¹ In particular, ransom language clusters around descriptions of two related events: “Israel’s past deliverance from exile in Egypt in the exodus, and its future deliverance from exile in the new exodus.”⁴² For example, God’s initial announcement of deliverance to the enslaved Hebrews, given through Moses, promises that “I will ransom (*λυτρώσομαι*) you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment” (Exod 6:6). Pitre lists twenty additional uses of ransom language in relation to the Israelite exodus from Egypt.⁴³ More importantly, given Mark’s new exodus motif, ransom language also pervades texts looking forward to a new exodus.⁴⁴ For example, in Isaiah we read, “But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have ransomed (*ἐλυτρωσάμην*) you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you” (Isa 43:1–2; cf. 43:18–19). Even more strikingly, Zech 10:8–11 states,

⁴⁰ “The Many for One or One for the Many? Reading Mark 10:45 in the Roman Empire,” *HTR* 109 (2016): 447–466, esp., 466, cf. 456–463. Cf. David Seeley, “Rulership and Service in Mark 10:41–45,” *NovT* 35 (1993): 234–250.

⁴¹ “The ‘Ransom for Many,’ the New Exodus, and the End of the Exile: Redemption as the Restoration of All Israel (Mark 10:35–45),” *Letter and Spirit: A Journal of Catholic Biblical Theology* 1 (2005): 41–68, 55.

⁴² Pitre, “The ‘Ransom for Many,’” 56.

⁴³ Exod 15:13, 16; Deut 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18; 2 Sam 7:23; 1 Chron 17:21; Neh 1:10; Esth 4:17 (LXX only); 1 Macc 4:11; Pss 74:2; 77:15; 78:42; 106:10; 136:24; Isa 51:10–11; 63:9; Mic 6:4; “The ‘Ransom for Many,’” 56–57.

⁴⁴ For the foundational study on Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark, see Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark* (WUNT 2/88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have ransomed (פִּדְיָתִי; LXX: λύτρωσομαι) them, and they shall be as numerous as they were before. Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and they shall rear their children and return. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria; I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, until there is no room for them. They shall pass through the sea of distress, and the waves of the sea shall be struck down, and all the depths of the Nile dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart.

Here, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, ransom language is connected with the return of the diaspora, portrayed as a new exodus through allusion to the exodus from Egypt.⁴⁵ A strong case can be made, therefore, that the Markan Jesus's ransom language in Mark 10:45 is part of the new exodus motif in Mark's gospel. This case will be strengthened by considering the relation between Jesus's death and covenant in Mark 14:24 and the identity of the "many" in Mark 10:45 and 14:24.

4.3 Jesus's Death as Covenant Renewal in Mark 14:24

The other hint at the significance of Jesus's death for the writer of Mark comes during the last supper when Jesus, lifting the cup, states that "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (14:24). This statement, like 10:45, addresses the importance of Jesus's impending death for "the many" (discussed next) but, rather than describing it as a ransom, refers to Jesus's "blood of the covenant." Commentators agree that this language alludes to the covenant ceremony in Exod 24:3–11 where Moses sprinkles the "blood of the covenant" on the people (Exod 24:8).⁴⁶ This event, as the second of three "covenant ceremonies" that follow the exodus from Egypt (Exod 19:1–20:20; 24:1–11; 34:1–35:29), also links Jesus's statement to the exodus from exile in Egypt. Mark's understanding of this new covenant or, perhaps more accurately,

⁴⁵ Cf. Isa 52:2–3; Jer 31:10–12; Mic 4:1–2, 8, 10.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Stackert, "'This Is My Blood of the Covenant': The Markan Last Supper and the Elohistic Horeb Narrative," *BR* 62 (2017): 48–60; Amy L. B. Peeler, "Desiring God: The Blood of the Covenant in Exodus 24," *BBR* 23 (2013): 187–205.

covenant renewal,⁴⁷ depicts Jesus inaugurating a new exodus.⁴⁸ This new exodus connection is further strengthened by the Markan portrayal of the last supper as a Passover meal and echo of the covenant language of Jer 31:31 (“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel”).⁴⁹ The narrative foreground of the new/renewed covenant in Jer 31 is a regathering of the diaspora, depicted as a *ransom* of Jacob’s descendants from the nations—that is, as a new exodus from exile among the nations:

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.” For the LORD has ransomed (פדה; [LXX: ἐλυτρώσατο; Jer 38:11]) Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.” (Jer 31:10–11)

Accordingly, the language of both covenant and ransom allude most immediately to the prophetic expectation of a new exodus, understood as the regathering of the scattered diaspora.

4.4 *The Identity of the “Many” in Mark 10:45 and 14:24*

If the ransom language in Mark 10:45 echoes the prophetic new exodus motif and the covenant language in Mark 14:24 depicts Jesus renewing the covenant God made with the people immediately following the first exodus, there is a corresponding answer to the identity to the “many” (πολλῶν) in both Mark 10:45 and 14:24: the descendants of Jacob who have been scattered among the nations and who are consistently depicted as those ransomed from the nations and regathered as part of the new/renewed covenant. Again, Brant Pitre helpfully catalogues references to the many/multitude in the Hebrew Bible that look forward to the regathering of the scattered descendants of Jacob through the language of the Exodus.⁵⁰ Perhaps most illustrative, Zech 10:8 reads “for I have ransomed (λυτρώσομαι) them, and they shall be as many (πολλοί) as they were

⁴⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Mark’s Interpretation of the Death of Jesus,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 545–554, esp., 550.

⁴⁸ Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, 381.

⁴⁹ Mark 14:12–16; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WB 34B; Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 370.

⁵⁰ “The ‘Ransom for Many,’” 60–64.

before. Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and they shall rear their children and return.” The reference to the many “as they were before” refers to when the Israelites became too “many” (πληθός; Exod 1:9) for the Egyptians and eventually left as a “multitude” (πολύς; Exod 12:38–39). This is just one example of the extensive use of “many” in the Hebrew Bible and other Second Temple Jewish literature to refer to the returnees from exile in the new exodus.⁵¹ Jason Staples summarizes his comprehensive survey of Jewish literature through the end of the first century, stating: “Jews in this period did not anticipate merely a *Jewish* restoration but a full restoration of *all Israel*.”⁵² Pitre summarizes the significance for Mark: “the upshot of all this is simple: Jesus’ words about a ‘ransom’ for ‘many’ in Mark 10:45 are directly evocative of the exodus, the exile, and the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel.”⁵³

Scholars regularly note these echoes of regathered Israel but argue that the writer of Mark uses them with a twist.⁵⁴ For example, Rikki Watt’s influential study of the new exodus motif in Mark acknowledges the echoes of the regathering of scattered Israel.⁵⁵ However, he avoids considering whether the “many” in Mark 10:45 and 14:24 may be regathered Israel by identifying Jesus as representative of “true Israel,” while acknowledging that this is never directly stated in the Gospel of Mark. This allows him to conclude that 14:24 “indicates that being a member of true Israel is predicated, not on one’s nationality or filial ties, but on one’s response to Jesus. This implies a redefinition of what it means to be Israel.”⁵⁶ This redefinition of Israel is never explicit in the Markan narrative but is necessary to support the identity of the “many” in 10:45 and 14:24 as all followers of Jesus rather than the scattered tribes. The reading that I propose enables the writer of Mark to be reading with, rather than against, the grain of

⁵¹ Cf. Jer 31:8, 11; Hos 1:10–11; Isa 52:14; 53:11, 12; Dan 9:27; 12:1–3; 1 En. 57:1; 1QS 8:12–14; 9:18–20; 4 Ezra 13:39–40; Jos., *Ant.* 11.133.

⁵² *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 341.

⁵³ “The ‘Ransom for Many,’” 64.

⁵⁴ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 35, writes, “But in Mark the Deutero-Isaian picture of the Lord’s triumphal way has suffered a strange reversal from its intersection with the theology of the cross.” Richard Hays concludes, “Thus, for Mark, Jesus’ death both *hermeneutically redefines* and *reconfirms* God’s covenant with Israel,” *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 36.

⁵⁵ Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 284–287.

⁵⁶ Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 353.

the source text, and does not need to appeal to an implicit equation of Jesus as the new Israel in order to explain the writer's repurposing of the ancestral writings. It also opens new possibility for understanding the relationship of Torah observance and Jesus's death in Mark's narrative world, as discussed next.

In summary, the sparse hints of the significance of Jesus's death in the Gospel of Mark coalesce around the new exodus motif found especially in Isaiah, but also throughout the Hebrew prophets: The Markan Jesus's statement that he will "give his life as a ransom" (10:45) alludes to repeated promises that God will ransom his people from exile scattered among the nations, just as he ransomed them from exile in Egypt. The Markan Jesus's reference to his "blood of the covenant" (14:24) and its setting at a Passover meal alludes to the covenant ceremonies immediately following the exodus from Egypt, and positions Jesus as the inaugurator of a new or renewed covenant (Jer 31:31) as part of the new exodus. In the context of Mark's new exodus motif, the identity of the "many," as the primary beneficiaries of Jesus's death, is best understood as the many descendants of Jacob scattered among the nations whom the Hebrew prophets foresee being gathered to the land. Pitre summarizes, "any prophetic speaking of the Son of Man giving his life as 'a ransom for many' would call to mind one thing: the still unfulfilled promise of the Lord to 'atone for iniquity' and to ransom the lost ten tribes from among the nations, bringing them home to the promised land in a new exodus."⁵⁷

Finally, insofar as the new exodus motif involves a regathering of the diaspora from the nations, this understanding of the significance of Jesus's death is able to integrate the insights of those who read Jesus's ransom saying (10:45) in the context of empire and Greco-Roman ruler discourse, for this regathering is "against empire" insofar as the diaspora are taken out from the nations.⁵⁸

5. Linking the Salvific Significance of Torah Observance and the Significance of Jesus's Death in Mark's Gospel

How then are we to relate the salvific significance of Torah observance (12:28–34; 10:17–22) with the role of Jesus's death as a ransom for the many

⁵⁷ "The 'Ransom for Many,'" 64.

⁵⁸ Especially, Thiessen, "The Many for One or One for the Many?," 447–466; Sharyn Dowd and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Significance of Jesus' Death in Mark: Narrative Context and Authorial Audience," *JBL* 125 (2006): 271–297; Seeley, "Rulership and Service in Mark 10:41–45," 234–250; Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Signification of Mark 10:45 among Gentile Christians," *HTR* 90 (1997): 371–382.

descendants of Jacob scattered among the nations? Just as Mark provides only hints of the significance of Jesus's death, he never explicitly addresses the relationship between law observance and Jesus's death.⁵⁹ Accordingly, this section simply suggests a perhaps most probable way that the writer of Mark might have held the two ideas together in their mind. The answer, I tentatively suggest here, is that Jesus's death, insofar as it involves forgiveness of sins in Mark,⁶⁰ atones for a specific subset of sins—namely, those ancestral sins that have led Israel into exile and which are ostensibly not yet forgiven because in the narrative setting of Mark Israel remains scattered among the nations.⁶¹ If so, then the economic force of ransom (λύτρον) suggests that Mark, like Eubank argues for Matthew and Giambone argues for Luke, sees moral sins as debt and Jesus's death as a payment of that debt.⁶²

This understanding that Jesus's death atones for a specific subset of ancestral sins finds support in the Markan narrative where forgiveness happens apart from Jesus's death. This is most clear during the healing of the paralytic (2:1–12) when Jesus first tells the man “your sins are forgiven” (2:5). Mark's Pharisees object, claiming that only God can forgive sins (2:7), but are foiled when Jesus then heals the man, illustrating, for Mark, that “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (2:10). Mark's point in the narrative is that Jesus has divinely given authority, while simply assuming that forgiveness of sins is something that God does—in the narrative present, as in the past, without reference to Jesus's death. Accordingly, in the thought-world of the Markan narrative, Jesus's death does not appear to be a new solution to deal with all sin, but a specific act that deals with one persisting problem—the continued exile among the nations—in a conceptual universe that already includes a mechanism for dealing with sin and a God who forgives.

If this understanding of the Markan significance of Jesus's death is correct, then Jesus's death, and Israel's responsibility to keep God's law, in the Markan narrative, serve two different purposes. Jesus's death “clears the slate” of ancestral and communal sins (cf. Dan 9:24–26), and yet individuals continue to be judged and rewarded based on their obedience to God's law—including

⁵⁹ Similarly, in relation to Matthew, Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing*, 13.

⁶⁰ Yabro Collins, “The Significance of Jesus's Death in Mark,” 550.

⁶¹ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 91, 163, argues similarly for Matthew's gospel, insofar as it is the accumulation of moral impurity, due to grave sins that threaten expulsion from the land.

⁶² For a succinct summary of the economic force of ransom language in the LXX, see Yabro Collins, *Mark*, 500–504.

entrance into the immanently arriving (9:1; 13:30; 14:25) kingdom of God. In addition, there is no indication in the narrative that within the expected and, from the compositional setting, soon-to-be-established kingdom, an alternative standard of righteousness is in place. According to the logic suggested here, obedience to the law of Moses presumably remained the expected standard of righteousness inside the kingdom of God.

On this reading, Jesus's death is not only a ransom of scattered Israel. It also serves as an example of self-sacrificial behavior that the disciples and others are called to imitate ("take up their cross and follow me," 8:34) and even those not scattered among the nations benefit as they can anticipate being reunited with those returning if they also persist until the arrival of the kingdom of God.⁶³ It is this regathered, reunited community that Jesus and the disciples, then, drink to in anticipation of when Jesus, hopefully with his closest followers, will "drink it again in the kingdom of God" (14:25) and so both those ransomed and the others who "repent and believe in the good news" (1:15) can hope to collectively experience a union with Jesus in the approaching kingdom (9:1; 13:30).

6. Implications and Avenues for Further Investigation

The solution that this study suggests differs from the solutions of Nathan Eubank and Anders Runesson in relation to Matthew, and Anthony Giambrone in relation to Luke insofar as each of their studies considers Jesus's death as addressing the problem of sin in general, rather than as a solution to one contemporary result of sin—that is, the scattering of the descendants of Jacob among the nations. Yet, elements of their conclusions may also be compatible with my argument regarding Mark's gospel. For example, it is possible that Mark also understands sin as debt and righteousness as wages earned (as argued by

⁶³ The time between the narrative and compositional setting of Mark and the arrival of the kingdom of God is a time to "repent" (1:15; 2:17), but "only those who endure until the end will be saved" (13:30). In this way, no one has kingdom membership in the present, but some have been given its secrets (4:11–12). These secrets consist of explanations of parables (4:11–20, 33–34), debriefings after debates (7:19–23; 10:10–12), knowledge of Jesus's messianic identity and impending death (8:27–33), and a preview of the kingdom (9:2–10). This secret knowledge is not for those already in possession of kingdom membership, but rather functions as a "cheat-sheet" for successfully "enduring until the end" (13:30). Therefore, following Jesus is not equated with kingdom membership in Mark, but entails a sort of advantage through special knowledge.

Eubanks in relation to Matthew), though Mark provides little tangible evidence for this (e.g., Mark 9:41). If so, Jesus's "excess of righteous deeds" might function in Mark to pay the outstanding debts of those long gone that have nonetheless resulted in exile among the nations. Similarly, Mark might assume, like many other first-century Jews, that almsgiving is a cultic act, though just one passage in Mark may suggest such an understanding (10:21). Runesson concludes that Matthew perceives of Jesus's death as taking the role of the temple cult in atoning for sin (whether temporarily or permanently) due to the defiled state of the temple. Our conclusion, in contrast, has no direct logical implication for the existing temple cult, and while Mark's narrative includes significant critique of the current temple leaders and predicts the temple's destruction, it never directly relates the ancestral sins to the present leaders and the destruction of the temple as Matthew's does (especially, Matt 23:29–39).

While the logic of our argument does not imply the cessation of cult, there is one piece of data in Mark that we have not yet considered that does link Jesus's death with the temple: the torn veil that immediately follows the death of Jesus (Mark 15:37–38). In light of the above suggested Israel-centric narrative perspective, what new possibilities emerge for understanding the unstated significance of the torn temple veil? That is, how does Jesus's death precipitate the tearing of the temple veil? What does it signify for Mark and his intended readers? Are the torn temple veil and predicted temple destruction (13:2) likely understood as referring to a recent event for the writer and readers, assumed to be permanent? Mark provides no direct answers to these questions.

Our argument, if correct, has implications for other areas of inquiry into Mark's gospel. For one, if Jesus's death functions primarily to bring the diaspora back from exile among the nations, what does this imply for the understanding of the kingdom of God in Mark's gospel? In particular, does Mark understand the future, imminent arrival of the kingdom of God (9:1; 14:25; 13:30) to be a restored earthly Israel? The few spatial indicators of the coming kingdom may support this (e.g., gathering "from the four winds," 13:27; the son of man "coming on the clouds of heaven," 9:1; 13:26; 14:62) as do other allusions to the regathering of the diaspora (e.g., "fishers of men," Mark 1:17; Jer 16:16).

In addition, what does the combined assumption that Torah observance matters and Jesus's death as ransom of the diaspora suggest about the social location of the writer and implied readers of Mark? While the New Exodus motif sometimes envisions gentiles as among the new Israel (e.g., Mic 4:2), most often Israel is removed from the nations (e.g., Jer 31:10–12),

suggesting an Israel-centric assumption on the part of the writer and, perhaps, intended audience.