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The persuasive function of the blood of Jesus in Matthew 26:28

ABSTRACT

In Matthew 26:28, Jesus links his blood to the forgiveness of sins during the Last Supper. Matthew's reference to "the blood of the covenant" in 26:28 is an allusion to Exodus 24:8, symbolising Jesus as a sacrificial offering that renews the covenant with God. References to Zechariah 9:9-13 and Isaiah 53:12 further link Jesus' death to the renewal of the covenant. For Matthew, the forgiveness of sins is a penultimate step for the renewal of the covenant that is the ultimate goal of Jesus' death. This article also contrasts Matthew's intertextual approach in the passion narrative with that of his prologue. It is argued that the shift towards allusions and echoes when explaining Jesus' death aligns with Matthew's strategy that can be described as a kaleidoscopic atonement theory, in which he weaves various Old Testament themes together to construct a comprehensive theory of atonement in Matthew 20:28 and 26:28.

1. INTRODUCTION

In line with the overarching focus of this *Festschrift*, this article investigates the themes of God, people, and persuasion in the cursory pronouncement of the Matthean Jesus on the atoning function¹ of his blood in Matthew



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1 It should be noted that the English noun "atonement" has no clear equivalent in Greek or Hebrew. Atonement in English can be understood, in terms of the *Chambers Dictionary*, as a compensating act by a guilty party that attempts to mitigate what he or she has done, in order to elicit forgiveness from the offended party (Carter 2016:36). This is, however, not how atonement language is used in the Hebrew Bible. In the

26:28.² While the Matthean Jesus had, on three previous occasions, announced his coming death (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19) and had given a rationale for his death (20:28),³ it is only in 26:28, during the Last Supper, that he makes his blood (a metonymy for his death) the basis for the forgiveness of sins. It is noteworthy that Matthew's account of the Last Supper is the only one in the New Testament that explicitly links the forgiveness of sins to the blood of Jesus. The direct link⁴ between Jesus' death and the forgiveness of sins in the New Testament is thus "disconcertingly slender", according to Carter (2016:3).⁵ Matthew, like the New Testament in general, appears to be more concerned with what Jesus' death accomplishes for "the many" than how it does this (Gorman 2014:12).⁶ This article intends to reflect on the latter: How Jesus' death effected the reconciliation of God and his people and how

Hebrew Bible, God is primarily the subject of atonement and it is only in the Greek New Testament that human beings are identified, in some instances, as the subjects of atonement, with God the object thereof (Carter 2016:36).

- 2 Both Matthew 26:28, which refers to the death of Jesus as being beneficial for many (*περι πολλών*), and Matthew 20:28 (via their respective parallels in Mark 10:45 and 14:24) share a possible link with Isaiah 53 (Edwards 2012:3-4). Underlying both references are the notions of exile and sacrifice.
- 3 As is the case with Matthew 26:28, the reference to Jesus' death as a *λύτρον* is linked in Matthew 20:20-28 to various acts, symbols, expressions, rhetoric, and language that create both inner (8:2; 18:1-4; 23:8-12; 27:38; 26:27-28, 39; 28:9) and intertextual echoes (for example, Dan. 7:13-14; Pss. 16:5; 23:5; 75:8; 116:13; Jer. 18:36; 25:15-29; Isa. 51:17-23; Ezek. 23:31-34; Lam. 4:21) that outline Matthew's understanding of atonement. Some of these intertextual references have been taken over from Mark's composition. Edwards (2012:7), for example, has identified Isaiah 53, Daniel 7 and 9, and Isaiah 43 as possible background for the different parts in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45: *ὥσπερ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἔλθεν διακονηθῆναι (Dan. 7 and 9) ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ (Isaiah 53) λύτρον ἀντὶ (Isaiah 43) πολλῶν (Isa. 53).*
- 4 Several texts (for example, 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:3-4; Rom. 5:8-10; Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 1:3; 9:13-14, 26) make an implicit link between the death (but not blood) of Jesus by referring to the removal of sin and the justification, purification, and sanctification of sinners by the death of Jesus.
- 5 The only other text that explicitly links the forgiveness of trespasses (*παράπτωμα*) to the redemption achieved by the blood of Jesus in the New Testament is Ephesians 1:7-8: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight" (NET). The Greek phrase "forgiveness of sin" (*εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*), which Matthew attributes to the blood of Jesus in 26:28, occurs for the first time in extant Greek literature in Mark 1:4 (*εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*) in reference to the baptism practised by John (Carter 2016:3, 17, 36-37).
- 6 Hagner's (1995:749) conclusion that, while Matthew does not spell out in full the mystery of Jesus' God-forsakenness on the cross, as well as of his death, Jesus' death represents, for Matthew, a substitutionary act whereby he saved his people from their sins (see 1:21; 20:28; 26:28). This is representative of the broad consensus of exegetes regarding Matthew's understanding of atonement.

it is presented by Matthew to persuade his readers of its theological implications.

2. THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AS CLIMAX OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

The importance of the link between Jesus' death and the forgiveness of sins is not due to the frequency with which it occurs in Matthew's narrative, but instead, to the position it occupies as its climax in Matthew's epilogue (Hays 2016:134). As the longest continuous narrative in Matthew (Hagner 1995:749), the epilogue is an example of rhetorical amplification (*αὐξήσις*), to ensure that the reader of the First Gospel understands the importance of the events described therein (Burridge 1997:524).

The first pericope (26:1-5) of the epilogue acts as a transition from the preceding final discourse of Jesus (24:1-25:46) to the narration of his death, in that Jesus in it confirms his coming death, as the conspiracy of the Jewish leaders against him starts to take shape. The transitional pericope is followed by various preparations for Jesus' death by himself, his followers, and the Jewish leadership. Jesus is anointed in anticipation of his death (26:6-13), Judas volunteers to betray him (26:14-16), and Jesus arranges the upcoming Passover meal (26:17-19). During this meal, Jesus blesses the bread and cup (26:26-30)⁷ and gives an interpretation of the meaning of his death by reinterpreting the Passover meal.

Following Mark, Matthew links Jesus' last meal to the Passover (Matt. 26:17), even though he does not mention that it occurred when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, as Mark 14:12 does. It should be noted that the Passover itself is not an atonement ritual. While it refers to the restoration of God's covenant with his people, it does not effect it. Instead, it reminds Israel that, as God had intervened in the past to save his covenantal people from oppression, he was poised to do so

7 The repetition of the present participle of *ἐσθίω* ("while they were eating") in verses 21 and 26 indicate that 26:17-25 and 26:26-30 are likely two pericopes that were initially transmitted separately and that have been joined together (Hill 1981:338). The change in the theme of 26:20-25 and 26:26-30, from the betrayal of Jesus to the meaning of his death, supports the idea that they were initially separated from each other, while the change of geographical locus in verse 30 separates 26:26-30 from the subsequent pericope. In the second pericope, Jesus' death is envisaged, and an interpretation thereof given through the reinterpreting of two elements of the Passover meal by him.

again (Burkholder 2015:212).⁸ Matthew's account of Jesus' last Passover meal does not give a step-by-step description of the celebration of the meal itself, but rather focuses on Jesus' reinterpretation of some of its symbolism (Hagner 1995:772-773). That Matthew only mentions one cup and the bread is probably because he only refers to the pronouncements of Jesus that reconfigured key elements of the Passover meal. Matthew also does not quote Jesus' blessings, but rather his understanding of the signs of wine and bread. These pronouncements of the Matthean Jesus are key to understanding Matthew's view of salvation. Whereas the Passover meal related the signs of bread and wine to the events surrounding the exodus of Israel from Egypt, it relates to a much greater act of redemption and salvation, according to Jesus. For him, it relates to the forgiveness of sins through his death on the cross, in that after he had broken the bread, Jesus took a cup⁹ and, after instructing his disciples to drink from it, describes his blood as "the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"¹⁰ (τούτο γάρ ἐστὶν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν). This reference, and the one to the breaking of the bread, is infused with Old Testament allusions (Burkholder 2015:214) that relate it to the blood of the new covenant that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

2.1 Exodus 24:8

The first occurrence of the phrase "the blood of the covenant" in the Old Testament is found in Exodus 24:8 during the covenant ceremony at Sinai. During the ceremony, Moses takes blood from the offerings of the twelve tribes and ceremoniously sprinkles one half thereof on the altar and the other half on the assembled people. While sprinkling the blood, he proclaims: "Witness the blood of the covenant that the Lord has established with you, in accordance with all these words" (NRSV). This sacrifice by Moses at mount Sinai ratified the covenant of God with Israel (Burkholder 2015:214). The allusion¹¹ to Exodus 24:8 in Matthew 26:28 thus

8 The Passover bread connotes the painful exodus from Egypt (see Deut. 16:3, which refers to the Passover bread as the "bread of affliction") (Nolland 2005:1075), which together with it being broken symbolises Jesus' coming suffering (Burkholder 2015:213-214).

9 1 Cor. 11:23-25 also refers to the cup, new covenant, and blood.

10 In Luke 22:26-27, the ransom saying of Mark 10:45 is omitted, while the reference to "the new covenant in my blood" at the Last Supper is also missing from the western manuscripts (Luke 22:19b-20). In Luke 24:45-47, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins to all nations is, however, linked to Jesus' suffering and resurrection.

11 This link between the Last Supper with Exodus 24 is further strengthened by Exodus 24:9-11, indicating that the sealing of the covenant with Israel also occurred in the context of a meal (Hays 2016:134).

indicates that Jesus himself is to be understood as a sacrificial offering and that his blood signifies the sealing of a new covenant by God with his people (Hays 2016:134). As with God's old covenant with his people, the new one also depends on sacrificial blood to be ratified.

It should be noted that Exodus does not explicitly explain the meaning of the blood ritual on Sinai or link it to atonement. In its original context, it did not function as a guilt or a sin offering that atoned for sin. Instead, it functioned as part of a ritual to ratify the covenantal relationship between Israel and God. Only later do the Jewish texts¹² and the Letter to the Hebrews explain its meaning in relation to atonement (Burkholder 2015:217-218).¹³

2.2 Zechariah 9:9-13

The reference to "my blood of the covenant" also alludes to Zechariah's prophecy in Zechariah 9:11 that God would deliver Jerusalem (Hays 2016:134-135). That Matthew does allude to Zechariah is supported by his quotation of Zechariah 9:9 during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (21:5) (Hays 2016:135). It indicates that Matthew shares Zachariah's hope for a messianic king who would bring peace to the nations and have dominion to the ends of the earth (Zech. 9:10). Zechariah 9:9-12 links this hope for a restored covenantal community to the "blood of my covenant" that is understood as a "repayment" for their redemption from captivity.¹⁴ The allusion to the restoration of the Sinai covenant by Zechariah, to whom Matthew in turn alludes, affirms that, for him, Jesus would renew Israel's covenantal relationship with God. This restoration indicates a new theological reality and not simply a change in the political fortune of Israel. The restoration is accomplished by atoning (the giving of a sacrifice) for the sin that had broken the covenantal relationship. In this sense, Jesus' death can be viewed as a sacrifice given for the sin of Israel (Burkholder 2015:215-216). Matthew's description of the Last Supper is thus a complex interweaving of intertextual echoes and allusions that recall both the sealing of the covenant by blood in Exodus 24 and the deliverance secured by blood envisioned by Zechariah 9 (Hays 2016:135).

12 The covenant in Exodus 24:8 is linked to God's atonement in Targum Onqelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Burkholder 2015:217-218).

13 The atoning meaning of blood is also explicitly stated in Hebrews 9:22.

14 See Eubank (2013:174).

2.3 Isaiah 53:12

The mentioning of Jesus' blood being "poured out" for many can allude to the violent death of a victim at the hand of others (LXX Lev. 17:4; Num. 35:33; Deut. 19:10, 21:7); to the use of blood in Leviticus for expiatory sacrifices (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34), or to the description of the suffering servant in Isaiah who "poured out (הִעֲרָה לְמֹות) himself to death" (Isa. 53:12 MT¹⁵). The last option can also link up with Isaiah 53:12 (LXX) which refers to the last servant song about the servant who bears the sin of many (Burkholder 2015:225). These allusions indicate that, for Matthew, Jesus' death benefited others in terms of forgiveness in that one of the major revisions he makes to Mark is to change Mark's ὑπέρ to περί (Matt. 26:28). The use of περί possibly reflects the sacrificial terminology of the LXX (Gundry 1982:528), since its meaning corresponds to ὑπέρ and can thus be translated as "on behalf of" (Hagner 1995:773).¹⁶ Forgiveness of sins by God is thus not accomplished for Matthew through personal obedience and effort, but by the sacrifice of Jesus (Gundry 1982:528). The use of other sacrifice terminology (ἐξαχυσνόμενον), which refers to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, strengthens the idea that Jesus would bring a sacrifice¹⁷ (Davies & Allison 1997:474). As the priests in the temple poured out the blood of the sacrificial animal on the altar to redeem them from their sins (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34), Jesus' blood is poured out for the sake of others¹⁸ (Heil 1991:37). Jesus' task to save his people from their sins, as already mentioned in his name (1:21) and enacted during his healing (9:2) and teaching ministry (6:12, 14-15; 18:21-35), is explicitly applied to his death (26:28).¹⁹

2.4 Jeremiah 31:31-34

It has been suggested that Matthew 26:28 also alludes to Jeremiah 31:31-34. This is, however, not as clear as the other allusions. Filson (1961:274), for example, notes that there is no mention of blood in Jeremiah 31:31-34. He, therefore, views 26:28 as only referring to Exodus 24:8. Luomanen (1998:224) also argues that there is no compelling reason to take Jeremiah 31 as background for 26:28. The only verbal agreement

15 Matthew does not seem to follow the LXX, in this instance.

16 The change from ὑπέρ to περί also brings the prepositional phrase closer to the LXX parallel of Isaiah's suffering servant (Burkholder 2015:241).

17 It is also a possible reference to Isaiah 53:4 (LXX) and Isaiah 42:6; 49:8, and 54:10.

18 The pouring of blood on people is rare in the Old Testament. It only occurs in the consecration of priests (Lev. 8:22-24) and the purification of lepers (Lev. 14:14, 25). In both instances, it indicates both the cleansing of persons and their dedication to God (Morris 1992:660).

19 The reference to "many" also recalls Jesus' pronouncement in 20:28. While the idea of Jesus' death as sacrifice could be implicit in 20:28, it is explicitly stated in 26:28.

between Jeremiah 31:34 (LXX) and 26:28 is the reference to sin (Davies & Allison 1997:475). It is thus better to understand this reference to sin in terms of Hays' (1986:23, 29) classification of intertextual references as an echo of Jeremiah 31. That it must be considered an echo instead of an allusion or quotation does not detract from the importance of Matthew's mention of sins. He intentionally added the reference to Mark 14:22-26 (and verse 24 specifically), since Matthew's source for the Last Supper makes no reference at all to the remission of sins. In Mark 1:4 (and Luke 3:3), the reference to the forgiveness of sins is instead used by Mark in relation to the baptism of John the Baptist. The reference to sins, however, does not occur in the parallel section in Matthew 3:2. For Matthew, the forgiveness of sins thus relates to the covenant initiated by Jesus' death rather than the baptism of John the Baptist (Davies & Allison 1997:474).

3. MATTHEW'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN MATTHEW 26:28

As he does with the birth and ministry of Jesus, Matthew uses the Old Testament to make sense of Jesus' death and to persuade his readers that what had happened was aligned with what had been revealed in it. The way he uses the Old Testament is, however, different. A well-known characteristic of Matthew is his inclusion of ten fulfilment quotations (1:22-23; 2:15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10) that are introduced by a common formula, and three others that are close variants (2:5-6; 3:3; 13:14-15) in his Gospel (Hays 2016:107). While five of the fulfilment quotations occur in the birth narrative (1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23), there is only one quotation (Matt. 27:9-10) in the epilogue that is introduced with an explicit fulfilment formula. It also comments on the death of Judas²⁰ and not that of Jesus (Allen 2018:54). Matthew, therefore, does not link Jesus' death to the notion that it happened according to God's will, as stated in the Old Testament through the use of a fulfilment quotation as he does with Jesus' birth (Allen 2018:52-54).²¹ Two questions arise from Matthew's use of the Old Testament: Why did Matthew change the intertextual approach he used in explaining the significance of Jesus' birth when describing Jesus' death? Why does he not indicate that it happened according to Scripture?

20 It is described as a fulfilment of Jeremiah. The material, however, actually comes primarily from the prophet Zechariah 11:12-13, of which it is a paraphrase (Allen 2018:61). It also contains material from Jeremiah 18:1-3, 19:11, and 32:6-15. This is the last fulfilment in Matthew (Allen 2018:60).

21 There is also no quotation in Matthew 20:28.

A possible reason for this change in intertextual strategy is that Matthew drew most of his passion material from Mark's passion narrative and thus simply follows his intertextual strategy (Allen 2018:53). It should, however, be noted that Matthew, in passages that he takes over from Mark, has no qualms in expanding and explaining Mark's allusions (Hays 2016:105).²² Matthew, for example, adds quotation formulas in 4:15-16 (see Mark 1:15); 8:17 (see Mark 1:32-34); 12:17-21 (see Mark 3:7-12); 13:35 (see Mark 4:33-34), and 21:4-5 (see Mark 11:1-10). Regarding the extra Matthean material that he includes in the passion narrative, it appears that, when it appeals to the Old Testament, it should be seen as an echo rather than an allusion (Allen 2018:54).²³ While this intertextual approach could be attributed to Matthew, who simply remains true to his unique source material, it remains a question as to why he then added specific fulfilment texts to the unique material he uses for his introduction (see 1:22-23; 2:15, 17-18, 23), but not to the unique material in his narrative as it nears its conclusion.

One possible explication could be that, by clustering his fulfilment quotations in the prologue, Matthew conditioned his readers to accept that the entire life of Jesus is the fulfilment of what the prophets had proclaimed (Hays 2016:108). It is, therefore, not necessary for Matthew to continue to use this formula to explicitly link Jesus' death to the forgiveness of sins, in order to persuade his readers that it was also the fulfilment of Scripture. It should, furthermore, be borne in mind that the fulfilment quotations are not the only way in which Matthew uses the Old Testament to persuade his readers. There are, for example, at least sixty Old Testament quotations in Matthew that do not have an introductory formula as well as hundreds of possible allusions to the Old Testament (Hays 2016:109). Matthew also views Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of Old Testament precursors such as Moses, David, and Isaiah's servant (Hays 2016:109). The typological similarity between Jesus and Moses found throughout Matthew is, for example, continued in this instance. Like Moses, as the nation's first liberator, offered a sacrifice for the people so that they could enter into a new covenant with God, Jesus established a new covenant by giving his blood (life) as a sacrifice (Davies & Allison 1997:473). It would thus be a mistake to limit Matthew's intertextual approach to using formalistic quotations from the Old Testament. There is, however, another possible

22 According to Hays (2016:174), "In his account of Jesus' arrest and death, Matthew not only preserves Mark's allusions to Psalm 22 and Psalm 69 but also turns up the volume of the allusions by introducing additional details."

23 See Pilate washing his hands in 27:24.

reason why Matthew chose to use a different intertextual approach. According to this proposal, it is possible that Matthew shifts from specific quotations to allusions and echoes because it allows him to construct a kaleidoscopic atonement theory.

4. A KALEIDOSCOPIC ATONEMENT THEORY

I borrow the notion of a kaleidoscopic atonement theory from Baker and Green, which I intend to use in a somewhat different manner. Baker and Green argue that different atonement theories should be used in a kaleidoscopic way in that there is not one definite or final theory of atonement in the New Testament (penal substitution, Christ Victor). With kaleidoscopic, I suggest that Matthew refers to different, interconnected aspects of the relationship between God and Israel in the Old Testament to construct one theory of atonement in 20:28 and 26:28. According to this kaleidoscopic intertextual approach, the sealing of the covenant on Sinai with Moses, the liberation of Israel from exile, the new covenant envisioned by Jeremiah, the sacrifices performed by the priest, and the suffering servant of Isaiah are used by Matthew in these two texts to evoke different events, pronouncements, and rituals. By evoking these different images through allusions and echoes, Matthew circumvents the question of how to integrate them into a logically consistent theory of atonement. As with the use of figurative language, in which metaphors can be mixed and overlaid over each other, allusions allow Matthew to do the same.

A kaleidoscope is an optical instrument comprised of a number of reflecting surfaces tilted at an angle to each other in a cylinder. Objects at the bottom of the cylinder appear as regular symmetrical patterns when viewed from the opposite end, due to their repeated reflection. If the bottom, containing the objects, is rotated, an ever-changing picture can be observed. Even though the picture changes, the different patterns of which it is comprised have a symmetry, due to the angle of the lenses in relation to each other. With kaleidoscopic intertextuality, it is not the individual texts and their links to specific intertexts that determine their meaning as is the case with direct quotations. It is instead the symmetry of the pattern that emerges when echoes and allusions are considered in relation to each other. Untangling the multiple possible intertextual links with various other texts one-by-one is, therefore, possibly not the best strategy for determining the meaning of the intertextual basis of both Matthew 20:28 and 26:28. Discerning their underlying symmetry is instead a better strategy for determining their persuasive power. In considering

the underlying symmetry of the different texts to which Matthew alludes or echoes, it is apparent that they relate to the restoration of the covenant. According to Gorman (2014:20-21), Matthew 26:28 echoes the Passover sacrifice and the Exodus, the covenant-renewal blood in Exodus 24:6-8, the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, atoning sacrifices (for example, Lev. 4:1-6:7), and the promised new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34.²⁴ In this sense, my suggestion is not far from Gorman's for a covenantal atonement theory in that the various texts all accept that Jesus' death had established a new covenant between God and his new people and as such it represents the culmination of various Old Testament prophecies.²⁵

To understand Matthew's kaleidoscopic atonement imagery that he uses to persuade his readers, it is important to consider that it is "the wider scriptural story – and particularly that of the prophets (26:56) – that is being fulfilled" (Allen 2018:54).²⁶ This embeddedness of Matthew within the wider scriptural story is already evident in the genealogy with which the Gospel of Matthew begins. This clearly links Matthew's narrative to the story of Israel. The story of Israel, as conveyed by the Old Testament, is essentially a covenantal faithfulness of God, despite Israel's covenantal unfaithfulness. Matthew continues this story, which determines his understanding of atonement. The pronouncement in 1:21 that Jesus would save his people from their sins indicates that the sins that Matthew has in mind are not only the individual transgressions such as those referred to in Matthew's Chapter 18, but also the national sins of injustice and idolatry that had led to the Babylonian exile and the present position of Israel (Hays 2016:111). The hope that Matthew proclaims is that Jesus would, as the saviour of his people, bring an end to their exile in their own country under Rome.

The kaleidoscopic link with the Old Testament in 26:28 provides a further reason for the paucity of references to Jesus' death atoning for sins in Matthew, as well as in the remainder of the New Testament, in that the forgiveness of sins is a penultimate issue compared to the restoration of the covenant, if it is considered within the wider story of the Old Testament

24 Various New Testament texts (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25) link the death of Jesus to the (new) covenant (Gorman 2014:15).

25 It is noteworthy that the testimony that prophecies are being fulfilled is placed on Jesus' lips (26:54, 56) rather than being offered as a third-party editorial gloss (as happens in the birth narrative) (Allen 2018:54). Together with Matthew's direct quotations of Scripture, the kaleidoscope of images indicate that, for him, Israel's Scripture was to be viewed as a predictive text that pointed to specific events in the life of Jesus (Hays 2016:107).

26 It could be that Jesus' death was already accepted, so that it did not require the same scriptural proof as Jesus' birth did (Allen 2018:54-55). This is, however, an argument from silence.

that Matthew continues. In this regard, Gorman (2014:8) criticised the various atonement theories that have been proposed because they tend to focus on the penultimate (forgiveness) rather than the ultimate purpose of Jesus' death (restoration and reconciliation). Its ultimate purpose was "to create a transformed people, a (new) people living out a (new) covenant relationship with God together" (Gorman 2014:9). For Gorman (2014:10), the forgiveness of sins is thus a penultimate issue.

The context, a shared meal, in which Jesus pronounces that his death would atone for sin is, therefore, significant. This last meal serves as the culmination of the table communion that Jesus shared with the disciples and others (Matt. 8:15; 9:9-17; 14:13-21; 15:32-39; 26:6-13). As such, it is a physical sign of the restored fellowship with God and each other that was made possible by the atoning death of Jesus (Heil 1991:35). It also anticipates the eschatological messianic meal that will finally realise the complete reconciliation between God and his people and the restoration of all of creation. Unlike Mark, Matthew explicitly links Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom to the events he symbolises in the Last Supper in line with the many allusions to the coming "time" *καιρός*²⁷ in his Gospel by adding the phrase "My time is near" (*ὁ καιρός μου ἐγγύς ἐστίν*) (Matt. 26:18) (Burkholder 2015:239). For Matthew, the means whereby the kingdom would arrive is Jesus' death and the events that were about to happen must thus be understood within the eschatological expectation of the coming kingdom of heaven that he had announced (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). In verse 29, Jesus refers to the eschatological conclusion of his death when he and the disciples will be reunited in his Father's kingdom (Hagner 1995:774). The pronouncement of Jesus thereby provided the disciples with a hope that went beyond the dramatic events that would follow. The prospect of the messianic meal with Jesus at the second coming serves as a powerful image for the completed reconciliation between God and man and the restoration of creation that will be fulfilled at the second coming. For Matthew (26:54, 56), Jesus' death is thus not the tragic failure of his ministry, but rather its fulfilment in line with Old Testament prophecies.²⁸ The salvation of his people from their sins, referred to earlier in 1:21, becomes a reality in the epilogue through Jesus' death.

27 See Matthew 8:29; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34, 41. These references to *καιρός* signify the coming eschatological judgement (Burkholder 2015:240).

28 Allen (2018:53) notes that Matthew follows Mark, and at times even duplicates his declaration that the Scriptures must be fulfilled (see Mark 14:49, Matt. 26:54, 56).

5. CONCLUSION

Matthew 26:28, in which Jesus associates his blood with the forgiveness of sins during the Last Supper, uses various intertextual references to develop a persuasive strategy for conveying the profound theological implications of Jesus' death. Matthew's reference to "the blood of the covenant" in 26:28 is an allusion to Exodus 24:8, portraying Jesus as a sacrificial figure responsible for establishing a new covenant with God. The allusions to Zechariah 9:9-13 and Isaiah 53:12 link Jesus' death to the renewal of the covenant. In Matthew's narrative, the forgiveness of sins is thus not an isolated event but rather a crucial step towards the ultimate goal of covenant restoration through Jesus' death. By weaving together various Old Testament themes and references, Matthew creates a comprehensive kaleidoscopic theory of atonement that underlies Matthew 20:28 and 26:28. Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' death transcends singular metaphors or scriptural quotations, employing a diverse array of texts and translations to underscore its profound theological significance as the ultimate fulfilment of numerous prophetic, ritual, and covenant-related elements in the Old Testament. This approach resonates with his readers' comprehension of the broader scriptural narrative, emphasising God's unwavering faithfulness to his people.

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