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Suffering

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Israel and the Church is a journal for Biblical and theological reflections concerning Israel and the Church in God's plan for this world in the light of His coming Kingdom.

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Suffering

The Bible speaks of the atoning power of suffering. Jesus suffered for the atonement of our sins. The question is: how can this be? This is all related to Jesus being King of Israel, which is explored in the first article.

To what extent, then, is Israel's suffering connected to Jesus' suffering? Or is it Israel's own fault, since they rejected Jesus as Messiah? After centuries of Christian defamation of the Jews, resulting in the Shoah, we need to find a different language of relating to Israel's suffering. An attempt is made in the other articles. Paul spoke of the partial hardening over Israel. But Jesus asked forgiveness for His torturers, for 'they did not know what they were doing.' Finally, does Israel's suffering itself have redemptive power? This is a very delicate question. We should be careful not to put our theological schemes on Israel. On the other hand, Scripture does hint in that direction.

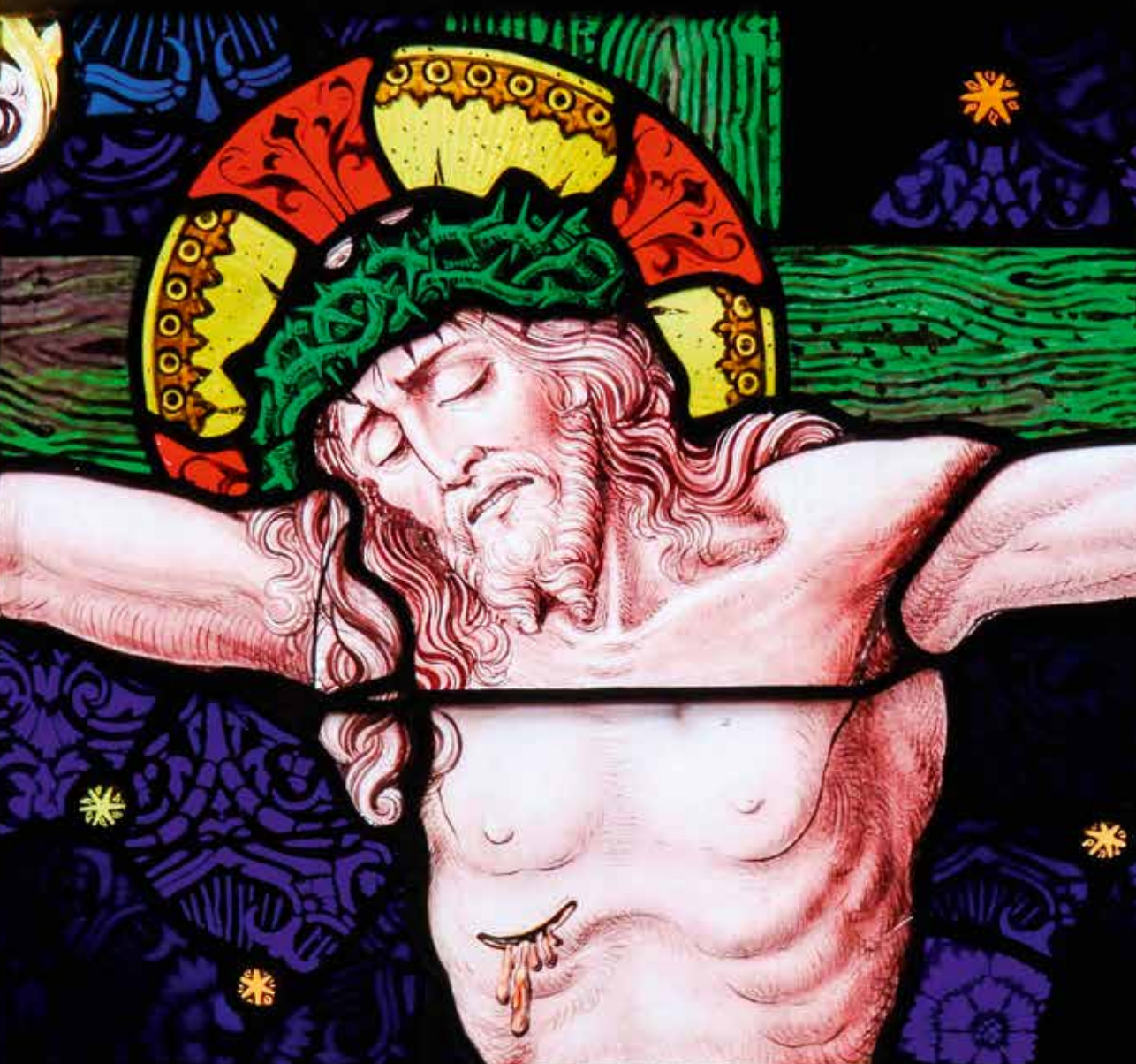
All in all, the last word has not been spoken. But we continue to pray for Israel, in the hope that, when you read this, all hostages will be free.



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ישעיה הנצרי מלך היהודים
IHΣΟΥΣ Ο ΝΑΖΑΡΑΙΟΣ
Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ
JESUS NAZAR·REX JUDEO·



DR. JAMES E. PATRICK

Why Only the King of the Jews Can Save Us from Our Sins

For nearly a thousand years, since Anselm of Canterbury wrote *Why God Became Man*, the church has taught that the incarnation was necessary for the reason that only man must pay for human sin, but only God was able to do so.

It is certainly true that only a sinless saviour does not need to pay for himself, and can therefore pay for sinners, and 'No one is good but God alone'. However, Christian theology has neglected the fact that God became Jewish flesh, not just human flesh. This has obscured the central key to the doctrine of salvation, which also unlocks the apparent injustice of the innocent paying for the guilty.

In this article, we will first consider the fairness problem with penal substitution, and its solution. Second, we will look at some examples in the Bible of where this sort of exchange happens, focusing on the roles of father, high priest and king. Third, we will explore the theology of Kings and Isaiah about the Messiah's ability to be a substitute. Fourth, we will look at the New Testament evidence for this doctrine, and ask how it can apply to non-Jews. Finally, we will think about how understanding and experience are related in personal salvation through the cross.

1. WHEN CAN THE INNOCENT PAY FOR THE GUILTY?

Among the many ways of understanding the cross (ransom, redemption, reconciliation, sacrifice), one of the most upsetting for some is 'penal substitution', meaning that Jesus takes our punishment on Himself. It is rarely mentioned in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18), usually echoing Isaiah 53 where 'the punishment for our peace was upon Him'. The justice problem is expressed most clearly in Proverbs 17:15 – 'He who justifies the guilty and he who condemns the innocent, both alike are an abomination to the LORD.'

To help us feel the sense of injustice, imagine a classroom where the teacher's well-behaved son sits within a class full of rebellious pupils. To deal with the problem, the teacher takes his son, beats him severely in front of the class, and sends him out. You will probably object at this point, saying that Jesus willingly suffered for us. Okay, we will change the story. The son sees that the class needs to be punished, so he offers to his father to take the punishment, and he is then beaten and expelled. Now the class just think that the

son is as crazy as his father. At this point, many theologians will offer the excuse that 'God's ways are higher than our ways' (Isaiah 55:9), even if it seems unjust to us humans. But this is not acceptable. Romans 3:25-26 says clearly that God displayed Jesus publicly on the cross to prove His own justice, so it must somehow be recognisably fair to everyone.

There is one very common occasion when the innocent pays for the guilty, and we all accept that it is fair and right. This is the unique situation when the innocent person has legal responsibility for the guilty one. For example, if a child breaks a window, the father should pay for it, even if he did not do it (and what he does with his child is his business). Or if an organisation suffers from fraud or non-compliance by its staff, a trustee can be held personally liable. Or if a representative of the church or the government is found guilty of abuse or moral failings, the archbishop or prime minister is expected to make a public apology. The legally responsible person, knowing the character of their dependent, created the environment in which they were able to do wrong, and is therefore seen as ultimately to blame. When the legally responsible one is punished, even if innocent, justice has been done.

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2. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF INNOCENT LEADERS PUNISHABLE

As with our own experience, the Bible shows evidence for this principle of penal substitution by leaders at various levels. At the level of family, Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi massacred the town of Shechem for raping their sister Dinah, and although Jacob was entirely innocent and angry at this, he accepted personal responsibility for his sons' actions. He

also knew that his private sin with Bathsheba had broken down the spiritual walls of Jerusalem, of his nation (Psalm 51:18-19 [Hebrew 19-20]; Proverbs 25:28).

But if it is true that a king's sin can bring punishment on his nation, Isaiah understood that the reverse must also be true. A king's righteous acts can restore his nation from judgement. So he prophesied of a coming king who would be born in the dynasty of David (Isaiah 9:6-7 [5-6]), who would be anointed (*mashach*) by the Spirit of the LORD to rule in righteousness (11:1-5;

61:1-3) and to bring his people back from exile (11:10-12; 61:4-9). In chapters 44-45, Isaiah first speaks of the fake 'Anointed' (*Mashiach*), King Cyrus of Persia, who is given this title by God simply because he will authorise the two things that the true Messiah is meant to do – regather the exiles and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple (44:26-28; 45:1-4). After predicting Cyrus' conquest of Babylon to allow Judah to leave (45-48), Isaiah turns to describe the true Jewish Messiah. Surprisingly, he appears as a despised 'Servant' (49:1-7), who will personally regather the exiles (49:8-13, 22-26) and rebuild Jerusalem (49:14-21).

What is it that qualifies this Servant to remake the covenant and restore Israel? His humble obedience (50:4-11), even interceding for sinners while being punished on their behalf (52:13-53:12). His despised service for them is again followed by exiles regathered (54:1-10) and Jerusalem rebuilt (54:11-17), and then even other nations are invited into the renewed Davidic covenant with Israel (55:1-7; 56:6-8). This righteous Servant King 'will make righteous the many, as He will bear their iniquities' (53:11). Just as their sin was credited to His account, so His righteousness will be credited to theirs. We know this from personal experience

too. A child's wrong actions will be paid for by his father, but inversely his father's fame in wider society will improve the child's reputation and opportunities.

Jesus suffered specifically because He was the rightful King of Israel

4. NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE FOR ROYAL SUBSTITUTION

Despite the relatively few references to penal substitution in the New Testament, this idea is presented in the most obvious way possible, in the most important places. All four Gospels have their own unique accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection, but ev-

ery single Gospel makes it clear that the charge for which Jesus received the death penalty was written above His head – '[This is Jesus of Nazareth,] King of the Jews' (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19-22). His own Jewish nation first rejected His claim of authority over them, insisting to Pontius Pilate that His royal title was a direct challenge to Caesar (John 19:12, 15), yet they knew He would 'die for the people' (John 11:50). Then the Roman soldiers mocked Him with a purple robe and crown of thorns before abusing Him as the representative of His whole nation, so His suffering became the epitome of antisemitism.

Jesus suffered specifically because He was the rightful King of Israel, in all four accounts, and readers are meant to understand that this was also God's reason for permitting such an apparent injustice. As Israel's king, Jesus was representing His nation not just to its own self-protective rulers and to the oppressive Roman authorities, but also before the supreme court of God Himself. The divine Judge accepted His substitution for His own nation's sins, to pay the full penalty for their historic and current and future transgressions. In return, His act of obedient righteousness could then be credited to their account, as many of them as

would accept His rightful kingship over them (John 1:11-12). His loyal subjects would eventually receive every reward due to Him, including resurrection, the gift of the Holy Spirit, eternal earthly inheritance, and kingship over the created world.

It is clear, then, that the Jewish people can benefit from the substitution of their legal King, but how can non-Jews also participate in this 'new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah' (Jeremiah 31:31)? How is the King of the Jews legally the king of gentiles also? It is not enough to argue that God is in charge of all creation, and therefore His Son can rule all humanity too. No, it must be a recognised legal claim of authority within human society that gives Jesus the rightful claim to rule all nations.

The answer is found in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, as well as 1 Chronicles 1-3 (some of the most awesome gospel chapters in all Scripture!). Here we find that the legal heir of the royal dynasty of David carries the right to become legitimate ruler over Judah, the firstborn tribe in Israel. And Israel in turn is the chosen heir of Abraham, who inherited from his ancestor Seth the authority to govern not just Canaan but all brother nations descended from Noah (Genesis 9:26-27). Noah himself was the promised heir, via Enoch, of Seth, whom God 'appointed [as] another Seed in place of Abel, for Cain killed him' (Genesis 4:25).

This is the same ‘Seed’ of woman whom Eve was promised would defeat the snake and restore human kingship over all creation (Genesis 3:15). This solid unbroken line of inheri-

tance from Adam, makes Israel the firstborn nation on earth, and David's legal heir is therefore God's 'firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth' (Psalm 89:27). Jesus is truly, legally, the 'king of kings and lord of lords' on earth (Revelation 19:15-16, from Psalm 2).

For this reason, Jesus as the King of the Jews is also the rightful King over every other nation, because of Israel's unique authority among all nations, decreed by mankind's common ancestor Noah after the Flood. As a result, any non-Jew from any nation can acknowledge Israel, and Israel's king Jesus, as the legitimate ruler over their own nation too, and in this way can receive Jesus' substitution for them. Jesus is the one whose unique authority and obedient suffering first enables Israel to be forgiven and restored to its promised inheritance, and then also enables every other nation to be forgiven and come back into right alignment with Israel in God's good purposes for the whole world (Romans 1:16; 15:8-13). 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth' (Isaiah 49:6).

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5. EXPERIENCING AND UNDERSTANDING THE CROSS

There are many who say that we must unite as Christians around primary doctrines (Trinity, God as creator, incarnation, salvation through Jesus, second coming), honour secondary beliefs about church practice which distinguish denominations (baptism, church government, spiritual gifts, women's roles), and

hold lightly to tertiary ideas (age of the earth, end-time details, tithing, Sabbath, alcohol,

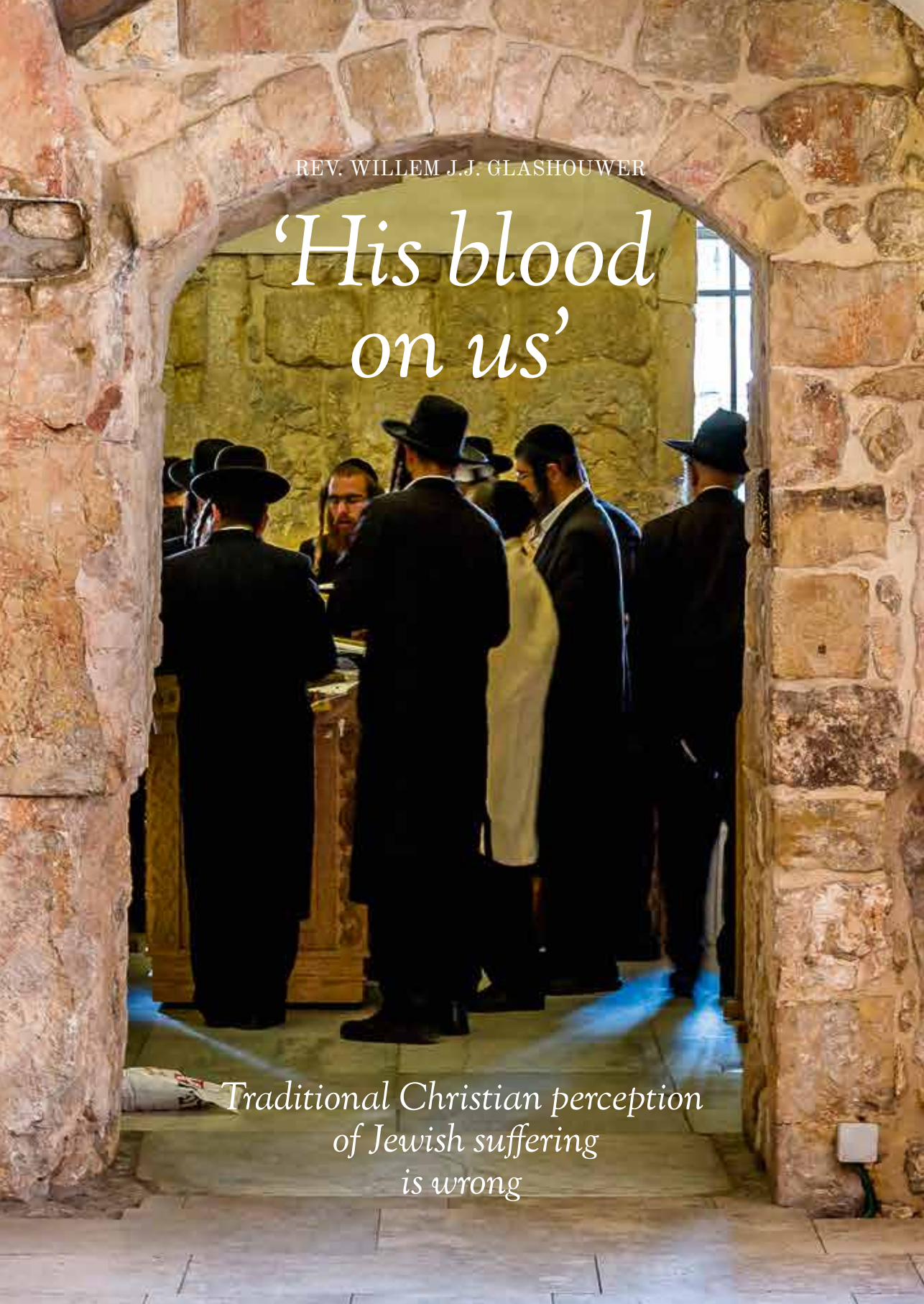
etc.). The relationship between Israel and the Church is typically tossed into the third category, however we have seen above that without Israel we cannot understand how the cross pays for our sins – a central primary doctrine. It is only because Israel has a permanent leadership role in God's plan of salvation for all nations, that Israel's King can grant salvation to non-Jews like us, until every tribe and language has heard. Jesus will only be King of Kings at His return because His nation of Israel is still God's firstborn nation on earth, destined to bless all nations.

If that is so, what does that mean for the large number of Christians who do not accept Israel's place in God's heart? Does that mean that they cannot be saved? That we should separate from them because their doctrine of the cross is flawed? No, there is a big difference between believing *that* the cross is necessary for our salvation and understanding *how* the cross saves us. All true Christians believe that Messiah died for our sins and was raised on the third day, both according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). We are united with all who believe this, not just with all who understand this, which is a much smaller number!

A helpful illustration of this can be found in Jesus' teaching about salvation to Nicodemus – 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life' (John 3:14-15). When the Israelites bitten in the wilderness simply looked up at the bronze snake made by Moses, they were cured from the poison. They did not have to understand how this worked, nor did Moses for that matter, and theologians today still find it mysterious. For two thousand years, non-Jews have looked up at the cross and experienced forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with God through Jesus, regardless of whether they understand the theological logic of atonement.

Even so, now that we can see why penal substitution by the King of the Jews is effective for both Jews and non-Jews alike, let us spread this good news with even greater excitement. Israel's King, who is therefore also our King, has paid for our sins and has granted to us every benefit of His own righteousness. All glory to the Suffering Servant!



A photograph of a group of Orthodox Jews, including men and women, standing in a line within a stone archway. They are dressed in traditional attire, including black coats and hats. The archway is made of rough-hewn stone, and the background shows a bright light source, possibly a window. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the light from the window creating a strong contrast.

REV. WILLEM J.J. GLASHOUWER

'His blood on us'

*Traditional Christian perception
of Jewish suffering
is wrong*



Christians have often said:

**‘The Jews rejected Jesus
and are therefore no longer
God’s chosen people.**

**All those centuries of persecution
of the Jews are God’s punishment,
because they murdered Jesus.’
As proof for this they cite the words
from the Gospel of Matthew
‘Let His blood be on us
and on our children.’**

Israel became depicted as the Wandering Jew: blind, craving for money, always deceitful and hungry for power. The Church conveniently forgot that she herself forced the Jews into the money-lending business in the Middle Ages by labeling that as a godless business, not to be entered into by respectable Christian people. The church forgot that she herself had prevented Jews from belonging to trade guilds and taking up ordinary professions and occupations. And what about the Jews' so-called thirst for power? If you follow the struggles for power between Christian kings and popes, landowners and nobility, tradesmen and farmers, citizens and cloisters, through the ages in all European countries, you get a good impression of what the word 'power-hungry' means. But time after time the Jews were robbed, hunted, raped, separated out and herded into ghettos, before finally being carried off to the concentration camps. A systematic attempt was made to murder every Jew: great and small, from the oldest to the youngest, they were to be gassed and the corpses burned in the crematoria.

Persecuting Jews was even considered to be a God-pleasing work by the church, for after all, were the Jews not the murderers of Jesus? It was forgotten that in reality the Jews did not murder Jesus, but that the non-Jews, the Romans did it. The Jews were not even sufficiently masters in their own land to be allowed to carry out the death penalty. The Romans were in charge. Whenever Jewish courts of law imposed a death penalty, they had to ask permission from the Roman procurator – in this case Pontius Pilate – and if he granted their petition, the sentence was carried out by Roman soldiers. And such was the case with Jesus. The Jews sentenced Him to death and the non-Jews, the Romans, crucified Him when they carried out the death sentence approved and pronounced by Pontius Pilate.

A systematic attempt was made to murder every Jew

Was Pontius Pilate put under pressure to do what the Jews wanted? Certainly. Although Pontius Pilate was not that easily to be intimidated. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13:1 we read, 'about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.' Sometimes he simply sent in the troops, creating a blood-bath and quenching the revolution. But in this case he decided differently. And although he washed his hand in water, claiming that he was innocent

of Jesus' blood, of course he still carried the responsibility. He was the Roman governor. The Jews could not execute any death penalty, because they were occupied by the Romans.

The Early Church knew who was responsible. This is why Pontius Pilate is

explicitly mentioned in the Apostles' Creed, which originated in the early Christian church: 'He who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.' Besides the names of Jesus and Mary, the only name mentioned in this old Apostolic Creed is the name of Pontius Pilate! The early church still knew who was responsible. Thus it is historically incorrect to say that it were the Jews who murdered Jesus. Incredibly, later Christian generations often helped to implement 'God's judgment' on the Jews.

HIS BLOOD BE ON US

One of the verses that was used throughout the ages by the Church to teach that Israel has been rejected and is under a perpetuating curse and judgment of God, and that the Church replaced Israel as the chosen people of God, is Matthew 27:25: 'Let His blood be on us and on our children.' Maybe the background for this expression can be found in Ezekiel 3:16-21.

Let us look at this Bible-verse a little closer and more carefully in order not to jump to conclu-

sions too quickly. At least six remarks can be made about this verse.

1. ONLY A SMALL CROWD

It was only perhaps a few hundred Jews, inflamed by some of their religious leaders, that stood shouting in front of the house of Pontius Pilate. The people living in the North of Israel didn't have a clue what was happening in Jerusalem. Had they known in the Galilee where He was raised and was very popular what went on in Jerusalem, many of them would undoubtedly have disapproved. So can one hold the whole of Jerusalem and the whole of Israel and the whole of the Jewish people together responsible, then and now, for what this small mob in Jerusalem did, incited by some of their religious leaders, asking for His crucifixion?

2. LITERALLY FULFILLED

When taken in their first and literal sense, these terrible words must have already been fulfilled. 'Us and our children' refers to that particular generation, and their children, the next generation of these Jerusalemites. Jews who shouted these words, and their children, were murdered forty years (the duration of one generation) later by the Romans, in Jerusalem. In 70 AD Titus and his legions razed the city and the Temple to the ground, murdering 1,100,000 Jews (according to the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus) and crucifying thousands from Jerusalem to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, until there was not enough wood left to construct more crosses. And in 135 AD (hundred years is another Biblical duration of a generation) Emperor Hadrian finished the job, by quenching the revolt under Simon Bar Kokhba in three years, killing another 600,000 Jews - in addition to those who died of hunger, disease, and fire, according to the Roman historian Dio Cassius. So, by this massive slaughter this prophecy has been fulfilled – if one takes the words 'us and our children' in their first and lit-



eral meaning. And all the rest of Jewish blood that was spilled over the centuries ever since, has nothing to do with God's judgment, but are terrible sins, crimes of men, waiting for God's final judgment..

3. IS THIS GOD'S WAY?

But this leads to another question. Did the Romans actually bring GOD's judgment upon these Jewish people, them and their children? Does God judge in such a way? Because even if it would be true that the small Jewish mob and some of their leaders in Jerusalem were taking the responsibility for the death of Jesus, among the many victims of the atrocities of the Roman legions there could well have been many Jewish Christians, as well as some Gentile Christians. And what about the Jews in Jerusalem who had not even participated in the shouting and yelling before Pontius Pilate, did they deserve God's judgment? This is enough reason to ask the question: was this destruction of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 70 AD and 135 AD really a 'judgment of God'? Does God 'judge' in such a way?

4. IT IS GOD'S TO AVENGE

Who will bring judgment? Man or God? Can Romans bring God's judgment on Israel? Can people execute God's judgment? Paul says in Romans 12:19: 'Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is Mine to avenge; I will repay', says the Lord.' God will one day 'avenge' the wrongdoings of man and all the spilling of innocent blood. Like the innocent blood of the Christian martyrs – Revelation 6:9-11: 'When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, how

and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.'

Did the Romans actually bring GOD's judgment upon these Jewish people, them and their children?

One day, God will finally sit in judgment to avenge all the innocent blood that was spilled on this earth. Paul says in Galatians 5:19-21: 'The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God.'

The conclusion must be: all the sins of men – Jews and non-Jews alike – await God's judgment at the end of time. He is to be the Judge. Men can never execute God's judgment. It all awaits the final verdict at the end of time. Till that time there is only One who was punished and felt God's judgment on behalf of us all: Jesus. Whosoever puts his or her faith in Him will not come into God's final judgment at all, the Bible says. So probably the destruction of Jerusalem and the land of Israel by the Romans in 70 AD and 135 AD was not a judgment of God at all, but crimes committed by the Romans - who will be held accountable for them in the final day of God's judgment.

5. PROPHETIC LAYER

Perhaps there is quite a different interpretation possible for this exclamation of the yelling crowd. Could this cry of that mob in Jerusalem have been an unconscious and unintentional prophetic truth being uttered? You may say: isn't that a little far-fetched? That is not what they meant to do! But it happened before. It

happened to the High Priest Caiaphas (John 11:49-50): 'Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, spoke up, 'You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.' Whether or not Caiaphas understood the full implications of what he was saying, his words were absolutely prophetic! That is how John understood those words: 'He did not say this on his own, but as High Priest he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one' (verses 50-52). It was the plan of salvation! Jesus, the 'one man', was going to die - to redeem many people and save them, Jews and Gentiles!

Could the cry 'His blood be upon us and our children' be understood in the same way? As an unintentionally prophetic exclamation, but nevertheless deeply spiritually and prophetically true? Because the blood of Jesus must come upon them and their children, and upon us and our children to cleanse us from all our sins! The blood of Jesus must and will also come upon Israel to cleanse Israel's sins. This leads to the final, and in my opinion, decisive point.

6. JESUS PRAYED

On the cross Jesus prayed: 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34). When He was praying this prayer upon the cross, Jesus as the Lamb of God was giving His blood to redeem all the sins of the world, right there and then. And now He is praying for one sin in particular. Jesus is looking from the cross at all those who were directly involved in His crucifixion. The Roman soldiers and the yelling Jewish crowd, and Pontius Pilate, and Herod and the Sanhedrin and all the people in-

involved in the process of condemning and killing Him. In His mind He sees all those who in one way or another took the responsibility for His death on the cross. And He says: 'Father forgive.' Would the Father not answer this prayer of His dying Son? Surely, because Jesus asked Him, He forgave the Roman soldiers and the yelling Jewish crowd, and Pontius Pilate, and Herod and the Sanhedrin and all the people involved in the process of condemning and killing Him. For they indeed did not know what they were doing. They did not have the faintest idea what was going on in this sacrifice for sin on the cross. Peter would later say: 'Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer' (Acts 3:17-18). The Lamb of God had to be slain in order for the sins of the world to be forgiven (John 1:29: 'Look, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!')

He has come into this world, to give His life as a free offering for the sins of the world. To be slaughtered as a Lamb. So this special prayer of Jesus on the cross ended the curse this Jewish mob invoked upon themselves right there. And all the innocent Jewish blood that was spilt throughout the ages waits for God's judgment and wrath at the end of time.

CONCLUSION

The Church needs to confess its guilt for a diabolical theology over the centuries that has led to the shedding of rivers of Jewish blood and age-long Christian antisemitism, before it is too late, and she will be held responsible before the throne of God. We as Christians personally should look into our minds, hearts and souls whether there is some hidden Christian antisemitism as well. Because God will ultimately hold us responsible.

**One day,
God will finally
sit in judgment
to avenge all
the innocent
blood that was
spilled on
this earth**



Did Jesus die as God?

KEES DE VREUGD

**Sometimes it is said:
 ‘God came to this earth
 to die for our sins’. That
 may not be untrue, but it
 is a statement that raises
 questions and needs
 nuance. Those questions
 came up in the preparation
 of this issue. They
 have also been asked in
 church history. Did God
 suffer on the cross? Is it
 not man who has to suffer
 the punishment for sin?
 One and all can be summarised
 in the question
 above this article:
 Did Jesus die as God?**

ATHANASIUS

One of the church fathers who thought carefully about guilt and redemption is Athanasius of Alexandria (4th century). He did so mainly in his polemic with the Arians. Athanasius argued that salvation takes place because the Son, with his divine nature, so penetrates and transforms our human nature that we become partakers of immortality in the resurrection of the dead. He, that is the Logos (the Divine Word), became man so that we might be deified (*De incarnatione Verbi* 54; *Contra Arianos* I.39). Athanasius uses the Greek word *Theosis*, which could be translated as ‘deification’, but which is best understood as sanctification. What is important here is also that creaturely existence is redeemed. That is: not just the soul, but also the body; not just man, but the whole of creation. In this context, it has been said: ‘what is not assumed is not redeemed’ - as a logical implication of the incarnation.

This line of thinking emphasises that it is God, who, in Christ, redeems man and creation. Redemption is God’s work. ‘God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:19). Christ is the God-man, the incarnation of the Divine Word. The divine origin of Christ was never in doubt in the early church. The main point of contention was to what extent He was actually fully human. The councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381) made the famous statement on this, which also became confession: [We believe] ‘in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God,] Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.’

But in the thinking and piety of the church, more and more emphasis was placed on the deity of Jesus, into which His humanity so to speak disappeared. Was it God, then, who died on the cross? The second council of Constantinople (553) formulated an answer, which became known as the theopaschitic formula: ‘one

a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient, unto death – even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name' (verses 5-9).

In this hymn, the stature of (a) God is contrasted with the stature of a slave. He was equal to (a) God. Here, in the Greek text, 'God' is always without an article. To make that clear, I added the indefinite article (which the Greek does not have). But in verse 9 we notice: 'the' God raised Him from the dead. Here it says God with definite article. This is a telling detail, indicating that this is God the Father. It is God the Father who raises His Son from the dead. Logically too, in the context of the text, it can mean nothing else. Jesus died as a human being, as a slave even. God the Father raised Him from the dead and exalted Him. He has given Him a name above all names. That is, He was placed as ruler over all rulers.

God the Father has again elevated the Son to the status He had 'not considered something to be used for His own advantage', namely to be equal to God. He is a heavenly, divine being. But the ultimate purpose of all this is sung at the end: all this is to the glory of God the Father. Again, by the way, there are no definite articles here. But 'Father' is sufficient as a clause to 'God'. Clearly, this is about the God of Israel. And everything Jesus the Son does, and everything He is, is to the glory of the God of Israel. Thus, in His own life, death, resurrection and reign, He fulfils Israel's calling. Thus

He brings all creation to its divine destiny: to be to the glory of God the Father: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory' (Isaiah 6:3).

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There are at least two parallels in the Old Testament that I would like to point out in this context. The first is the song about the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14, especially verses 12-15). The king of Babylon is drawn as a heavenly figure. He was a morning star, a son of the dawn, but he fell from heaven (verse 12). Whether this is a metaphor or not, it at least describes the exalted position of the king of Babylon - and his arrogance. The reverse of the Messiah is going on. The king of Babylon wants

to ascend (back) to heaven, but falls into the realm of death. The Messiah was in heavenly glory, but voluntarily abandoned it to enter the realm of death.

The second parallel is Daniel 7. There, the Son of Man appears as a heavenly figure who receives from God (called the Ancient of Days) eternal dominion over all nations. He appears to be the personification of the people of Israel (the people of the saints of the Most High, verses 18, 25 and 27). He receives in heaven His divine authority to exercise power on earth. The descent that the hymn in Philippians sings about is not described here. But the connection between heaven and earth is clear. It is about the heavenly authority to rule on earth.

GOSPEL

Compared to the other three Gospels, in John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of His heavenly origin and

proxy in a much more direct way: 'For I have come down from heaven...' (John 6:38). And further on: 'And now if you would see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before?' (verse 62) 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world' (8:23). Jesus is the Son, who sets free (John 8:36). And He is the Word made flesh (John 1). Jesus has authority to lay down His life and take it up again (John 10:18).

The Son's heavenly descent and heavenly authority is clear. But it is also clear: the Son is the very image of the Father; the Son and the Father are one, but they are not the same. They are one in a relationship of Father and Son and Son and Father. What Paul calls the resurrection power by which God works in the Messiah is in the Gospel of John the authority that the Son receives from the Father. Always, therefore, it emanates from the Father. The Son represents the Father. But then actually also always points away from himself to the Father.

ISRAEL

This journal is called *Israel and the Church*. Gradually we are coming to realize in the Christian world that we cannot speak about God's actions while neglecting Israel. We are beginning to discover that John 1: 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us',

is not an abstraction, but the concrete connection of God not simply to human history in general, but to Israel. The incarnation, the descent of the divine Word into human existence, had long been prepared in God's covenant history with Israel. The incarnation does not cancel that, but rather confirms it (for the word confirm cf. Romans 3:31 and 15:8). This connection of God with Israel, confirmed and embodied in His Son, is for the salvation, not only of Israel, but of the world (1 John 2:2).

Anselm asked the question why God became man. We need to sharpen that: why did God come into the world in Israel? I have just tried to give an answer: it is the confirmation of His covenant history with Israel, grounded in His eternal love. The Word took on Jewish flesh, right from the calling of Abram and the formation of Israel as a people at Sinai. And in the latter days in the Son (cf. Heb. 1:1), together with Israel being called God's Son (Exodus 3:14, Deuteronomy 14:1; Hosea 11:1).

CONCLUSION

Let us return to the initial question. Biblically, I think we should say that Jesus died as a human being, stripped of all divine glory. But God the Father powerfully proved Him to be the Son of God when He raised

Him from the dead (Romans 1:3) and He gave Him a Name above all names (Ephesians 1).

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but of the world**



DR. TOBIAS KRÄMER

‘Israel has experienced a hardening in part...’

(Romans II:25)

*Reflections on the
biblical motif of pórosis*



The motif of ‘hardening’ (pórosis / πώρωσις) plays a major role in Paul’s great passage on Israel in Romans 9–11. Behind this lies the apostle’s painful experience that large parts of Israel do not accept the Gospel. This is due to the condition of Jewish hearts, the πώρωσις. The term πώρωσις means hardening, closed-mindedness, unreasonableness, and results in something being rejected or denied. Paul sees that the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not reach many Jewish hearts because they are rejecting it. However, this is nothing new. For Jesus (despite all the positive response) already encountered resistance during his time on earth, so that the rejection of his fellow countrymen accompanied him from the beginning.

However, this hardening of the heart can be traced back much further in the history of Israel. In fact, it is evident wherever there is idolatry, breach of covenant, disobedience, and resistance to God, and this was already the case at the time of the golden calf (Exodus 32). Israel was rarely wholehearted in its devotion to God. Throughout the centuries, it was usually the case that part of the people were obedient to God, while the other part sinned; that some were called to repentance, while others were hardened. This experience gave rise to the theology of the 'remnant': the small remnant faithful to the covenant against the multitude of the unfaithful. Paul picks up on this when he says, now also for his time, 'A remnant has remained' (Romans 11:5).

In the Bible, the remnant are those who remain faithful to God. In the time of Elijah, there were 7,000 who did not bow their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:18; cf. Romans 11:2-4). In the time of the prophets, it was those who listened to the prophets; in the days of John the Baptist, it was those who repented and were baptized. At the time of Jesus, the remnant was made up of those who accepted Jesus; after Easter, it refers to the Jews who embraced the Gospel in faith. The remnant has an important spiritual function: it represents the whole of Israel. Because the remnant exists, Israel is not yet finished, for there are still people in Israel who maintain their connection to God, listen to God, and walk with him. The remnant is therefore of great importance for Israel: it ensures Israel's existence. It is therefore not surprising that Paul emphasizes that this remnant is primarily attributable to God. It is thanks to God's grace that this remnant exists at all (Romans 11:5).

Nevertheless, Paul wonders why so many Jews suffer from *πῶρωσις*. Why does only a small portion of the Jews of his time believe in the Gospel, while most do not? Where does this resistance to their own Messiah and the redemptive power of the cross come from? Why does the Gospel find so little resonance among Jews, even though it is good news? These questions

will now be addressed, following Paul's explanations in Romans 9-11. Other contexts related to the motif of *πῶρωσις* will also be discussed.

THE JEWISH REJECTION OF THE EARTHLY JESUS

Jesus had friends and enemies. This is not unusual for prominent figures. Jesus had friends mainly among the common people. Many followed him or revered him. Jesus was met with skepticism especially among the leading circles: among the Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests. There were perfectly objective reasons for this, because Jesus claimed (at least indirectly) to be the Messiah. This claim could be questioned, because it was not obvious that Jesus was the Messiah. Furthermore, Jesus violated traditional rules (not those of Scripture, but those of the fathers) that were sacred to many. Added to this were base motives such as envy (Mark 15:10) and human emotions such as fear of the Romans (John 11:50). The situation was complex. The controversy surrounding Jesus was therefore inevitable.

However, it was quite another matter to have Jesus murdered. Only a small group of Jewish leaders pursued this plan. They recruited a group of fanatical loudmouths to pressure Pilate into executing Jesus. The murder of Jesus can therefore only be blamed on that group, not on the Jewish people as a whole, and of course on Pilate, who bowed to pressure. The accusation, widespread in the Middle Ages, that the Jews were all 'Christ killers' is completely divorced from reality. What is clear, however, is that the group that carried out the murder of Jesus was massively guilty. So much for the human side of the story.

Let us turn to God's side. The crucifixion of Jesus was not an 'accident' for God. This is clear from the fact that Jesus not only announced his death, which was foreseeable at a certain point (cf. Matthew 23:37), but also his resurrection (Matthew 17:23). Jesus knew that the path he walked during his days on earth would not lead to the throne of David in Jerusalem. This path would lead through death to Jesus' resurrec-

tion. That was God's plan. Jesus' path was predetermined by God, and Jesus walked it. This means that God chose the path of pain. For Jesus' murder was not only associated with the pain of crucifixion — it must also have caused God in heaven tremendous pain. The point of pain presented God with a choice: revenge or forgiveness? God made this decision in a unique way by taking Jesus' death as a sacrifice, as an atoning sacrifice for the guilt of all people (Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:19). This revaluation is an act of greatest grace. Nowhere is grace more evident than where it occurs in the face of greatest pain and massive guilt. God wanted to express this unsurpassable grace that characterizes him.

However, there are other reasons that led to this choice:

- Sacrifices of atonement and guilt were of central importance in the Old Testament. But if this sacrifice of atonement exists in the life of the Messiah, the significance of guilt is further increased (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The Messiah had to die for our sins! This makes the cruel nature of sin frighteningly clear.
- Jesus' death was the prerequisite for his resurrection. Without death, there would be no resurrection. The resurrection, in turn, is the victory over death and the breakthrough into new, eternal life. The transition from death to life took place in Jesus, in his person. That is why Jesus had to die.
- The crucifixion of Jesus was a scandal. Nowhere is the depravity of human beings more clearly demonstrated than here: betrayal, failure, and intrigue led to Jesus being murdered in cold blood. The crucifixion of Jesus holds up a mirror to humanity: 'This is what you are

like, look at yourselves.'

God therefore had good reasons for choosing the difficult path of the cross. However, in order for Jesus to be able to walk this path, it was necessary that the leaders of his people did not recognize him, otherwise they would not have crucified him (see 1 Corinthians 2:8). The blindness of the leaders was therefore necessary for God's plan to succeed. This does not exonerate them, but it does put the whole process in a different light. For Jesus died for our sake (Rom. 4:25). This explains why Jesus was rejected during his days on earth, and indeed had to be rejected in a sense. However, this does not answer the question of the post-Easter **πῶρωςις** (the hardening of the Jews' hearts toward the Gospel).

THE JEWISH REJECTION OF THE GOSPEL

Paul explains that the Jews had the best conditions for coming to faith in Jesus. After all, the Gospel was preached to them by their own people. And it was well-founded through eyewitness accounts of the appearances of the risen Lord. Nevertheless, it often fell on deaf

ears among the Jews, that is, on **πῶρωςις** (Romans 10:26-21). There were various reasons for this. On the one hand, from the perspective of traditional Jewish belief, the Gospel was offensive (Galatians 3:13). It was therefore not so easy for Jews to accept the Gospel. Furthermore, Israel's spiritual leadership never integrated the Gospel.

They fought against it in

part (Acts 9:1-2), they sometimes let it go (Acts 5:34-39), but they never took it up positively, let alone made it binding for Israel. In summary, one can say that the leaders rejected the Gospel.

This had consequences. For the decisive 'no' at that time continues to have an effect. This

**Paul explains
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‘no’ makes it difficult for the Gospel to reach Jewish hearts to this day, especially the hearts of orthodox (‘believing’) Jews. The πῶρσις is both the cause and the doom. Jews rejected Jesus (cause) and blocked themselves and future generations from access to Jesus (doom). See Romans 10:26-20 and Romans 11:8-10. Nevertheless, God continues to call his people to faith in the Gospel (Romans 10:20). Nothing has changed in this regard.

Paul now goes one step further. He shows that πῶρσις is not only a natural consequence of the Jewish rejection, but also God’s judgment: ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day’ (Romans 11:8). A veil lies over Israel as a whole, obscuring the Gospel. This is God’s consequence. But even with this, God still has a good plan. For the Jewish rejection was an essential reason for the triumph of the Gospel in the Gentile world—in this way, ‘salvation has come to the Gentiles’ (Rom 11:11). If more than two billion people today profess the Christian faith in a narrower or broader sense, then this also has to do with the Jews’ rejection—this connection exists. Paul sums it up: ‘πῶρσις has happened to Israel in part’ (Romans 11:25). There is πῶρσις among the Jewish people. But there are also Jews who believe in Jesus. Both are true.

It is important to note that πῶρσις has both a human and a divine side. It must not be understood solely as the sin of Israel or solely as the action of God – it is both. This insight leads us to avoid two one-sided misinterpretations:

- The πῶρσις of the Jews cannot be attributed solely to God, who actively blinded the Jews, so to speak, in order to reach the Gentiles with the Gospel. If that were

the case, the Jews would be victims of their own God. That would be cynical. But the situation is different. The Jews rejected Jesus and the Gospel. According to Paul, they should not have done so, and it is their responsibility (Romans 10:16-21).

- The πῶρσις of the Jews is not solely attributable to their culpable behavior—it is also God’s punishment. God is straightforward with Israel. This has always been the case (cf. Amos 3:2). Their stubbornness is therefore consistent. It is not only self-imposed, it is also imposed upon them. But God does not write Israel off. In the end, ‘all Israel will be saved’ (Romans 11:26). God’s will for Israel’s salvation prevails.

The Jews’ rejection is just as much a part of God’s plan as His desire to save Israel

The Jews’ rejection is just as much a part of God’s plan as his desire to save Israel. God reconciles both aspects. Although Israel initially has the freedom to reject Jesus as the Messiah, in the end Israel and Jesus come together—for the salvation of Israel (cf. Rom 11:26–27). For those familiar with the Old Testament, this is not surprising (cf. Ezekiel 36:24-28). But the path to this point is rocky for Israel.

SUFFERING AND TEARS: THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

Although God is writing salvation history with Israel, Israel’s path is a story of suffering unlike any other. But why?

Hardly anyone has summed up the causes of suffering as excellently as the great reformer John Calvin. In his Institutes of the Christian Religion (1.18.2), he shows that one and the same point of suffering can be a consequence of sin, an attack by the devil, and a judgment or test from God. This is confusing, but it prevents hasty interpretations.

These three dimensions can also be seen in Israel—and even a fourth:

1. Sin.

The world hates the Jews, and without reason. This is a fundamental experience that Jews have had throughout history. The culmination of hatred toward Jews was the Holocaust, and even that happened without any real reason. (Incidentally, there are no reasons that would justify the extermination of a people.) Hatred toward Jews is sin. The Bible itself reports or hints at this (Genesis 12:3; Zechariah 1:15; Book of Esther). This hatred can go so far that one day the whole world will turn against Israel (Zechariah 12:14; Ezekiel 37:38; Revelation 20:7-10).

2. The Devil.

But there is more behind people's hatred of Jews: the Devil himself. In fact, the endless history of hatred of Jews cannot be explained on a purely human level. For antisemitism is a human phenomenon. It has existed throughout history and can be found in almost every place. When we see the devil behind hatred of Jews, it becomes understandable. The devil hates God, and he takes out this hatred on God's people, the Jews (Revelation 12:13-16).

3. Judgment.

Israel broke its covenant with God early on. Through his prophets, God calls Israel to repentance. In the second stage, God sends judgment: famine, drought, the Philistines, and finally the Babylonian exile. The destruction of Israel by the Romans (1st and 2nd centuries) led to the dispersion of Israel, the Diaspora. There, the Jews were directly exposed to the hatred of the nations (cf.

Deut. 28:65-67). In Luke, the dispersion is seen as God's punishment (Luke 21:20-24), while in Matthew it is seen as a consequence of Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah (Matt. 23:37-39).

4. Election.

Israel is not a people like any other. It has a calling and an election from God, it is in covenant with God and has a destiny (Genesis 12:1-3; Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Romans 11:28). Israel is the people of God, the people of Jesus, and the people of the (returning) Messiah. Israel represents God before a sinful world, and the world acts against Israel. A battle between light and darkness ensues (Zechariah 12:3), but the nations can also be drawn to the light of Israel (Isaiah 60:1-3).

Christians should be aware of the diverse backgrounds of endless hatred towards Jews

Christians should be aware of the diverse backgrounds of endless hatred toward Jews. Those who have not yet discovered Israel's special position can thus recognize that Israel truly is a special people — the people of God. But to those Christians who have long understood

this, yet 'elevate Israel to heaven,' let it be said: Israel is not yet the redeemed and holy people.

There is sin and guilt in Israel, as in every other nation (Romans 3:9-17). Nevertheless, our solidarity and loyalty must remain with Israel. They apply to the Israel of today, in which there is both good and bad. For God remains faithful to this Israel.

Zion says, 'The LORD has forsaken me; the Lord has forgotten me.' 'Can a mother forget her nursing child? Does she feel no compassion for the child she has borne? Even if she were to forget, I will not forget you!' (Isaiah 49:14-15; cf. Jeremiah 31:36)

OUTLOOK

The consequences of πῶρσις were serious. Since the Jewish rejection, Israel has gone through history without any reference to Jesus. This is because post-Christian Judaism (with the exception of Messianic Jews) formed itself without Christ. It became Rabbinic Judaism and has remained so to this day. The rejection of Jesus Christ is an essential element of rabbinical Judaism and is part of the self-image of an Orthodox Jew. This rejection is linked to one of the greatest sins in church history: Christian hatred of Jews – a perversion without parallel.

In return, the Gentile Christian Church separated itself from its Jewish background. As a result, Christianity became an independent religion without any connection to Israel (Nicaea). Thus, there is also a πῶρσις in Christianity, namely towards Israel. The rejection of Judaism was an essential element of Gentile Christianity for centuries and continued until the Holocaust (the Shoah). Only after that did a certain return to Israel and the Jewish roots of Christianity begin.

In both cases, from a New Testament perspective, these are misconceptions. No one knows this better than Messianic Jews, who reject both of these negative views. They profess their belief in Israel as God's covenant people (to Christians), but at the same time also in Jesus as the Messiah (to Jews). The same applies to Christian friends of Israel. They too recognize that the living God stands behind both Israel and Jesus and gives both spiritual significance.

These approaches are promising. For in the new world that the Messiah will one day bring, there will no longer be either of these two 'no's.' There, Israel will be recognized by all as the people of God, and Jesus as the Messiah of God. Then the suffering of the Jews will also come to an end (Revelation 21:4).







REV. CORNELIS KANT

The Redemptive Suffering of Israel



**The suffering and death
of Jesus were anything but
meaningless or purposeless.**

**On the contrary,
His suffering and death
brought about the
redemption of sin and
reconciliation for the world.**

**He would drink the cup to
the very last drop and fully
complete His suffering so
that we might be delivered
from sin and eternal death
through this alone.**

**The cross, therefore, is not
only an instrument of
torture, but it has become
the ultimate Christian
symbol of redemption
and reconciliation.**

n the Bible, we read that Jesus and His people, Israel, are closely connected. The Lord God calls His people Israel His son: 'Israel is My son, My firstborn' (Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1). And of both Israel and Jesus, it is said: 'And out of Egypt I called My son' (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15). Jesus is the firstborn of the Jewish people; He is the King of the Jews. And at His return, God will 'give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever' (Luke 1:32-33).

The Jewish people have a long history of suffering, persecution, and antisemitism. This suffering contains so many dark depths that it could be called the epitome of senseless suffering. Yet, at certain moments, the suffering of Israel also bears signs of meaning and purpose—of redemption and reconciliation. At times, there is a striking parallel with the suffering of Jesus—not to complete or supplement His suffering, for Jesus fully accomplished everything in His suffering and death. Still, there is a profound connection between the suffering of Jesus and His Jewish people.

JOSEPH

His brothers were irritated by his dreams and his beautiful robe and decided to sell Joseph as a slave to a caravan of Ishmaelites. This marked the beginning of Joseph's long years of suffering: sold as a slave, unjustly imprisoned, marked for death, and waiting, almost in despair, for hopeful deliverance. Miraculously, he was elevated to the position of viceroy in Egypt and was reunited with his brothers. The tables had turned—they were now dependent on him.

When his brothers realized that this powerful ruler was their own brother Joseph, they were terrified that he would seek revenge. But Joseph reassured them, saying, ‘it was to preserve life that God sent me ahead of you’ (Genesis 45:5). Joseph’s suffering seemed meaningless but had a definite purpose: it brought deliverance from famine for his family and people, and even reconciliation with his brothers. There are several striking parallels between the suffering of Joseph, Jesus, and the Jewish people.

MOSES

God called Moses at the burning bush to lead His people Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. His life had already begun in a remarkable way in that basket of bulrushes on the Nile and his upbringing in Pharaoh's palace. Instead of receiving gratitude and acceptance, Moses was met with rejection and denial by his fellow Israelites: 'He supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. They said to him: 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' (Acts 7:25, 27). Stephen recounts this story in his defense before the Council: 'This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'—this man God sent as both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out, performing wonders and signs' (Acts 7:35–36). Moses endured much suffering—criticism, rejection, and complaints. Yet God used him to liberate His people and bring them home. Moses' suffering was not meaningless but part of the broader context of deliverance.

PAUL

The Apostle Paul also endured much rejection and suffering. Spiritually, he suffered from the guilt of having previously persecuted the followers of Jesus. After his extraordinary encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and his realization that Jesus is the Messiah, he was deeply ashamed: 'For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain' (1 Corinthians 15:9–10). His earlier persecution of the church, his dramatic conversion, and his being filled with the Holy Spirit are all part of God's purposes in his life.

After meeting Jesus, Paul realizes he is called by God to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles. Through Paul, God wants the world to know and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Redeemer. During his travels, Paul frequently encountered rejection, slander, oppres-

sion, imprisonment, and even torture. His life could be described as a long road of suffering. He wrote his letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon from prison. His suffering was in service to his calling. When Ananias hesitated to help Paul in Damascus, the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My Name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer in behalf of My Name' (Acts 9:15–16). Paul's suffering served his Gospel preaching, and thereby the salvation of many. It also contributed to the founding of numerous churches throughout the Middle East and Europe. His suffering even served to glorify God's Name.

That is a profound and almost incomprehensible concept: suffering for the sake of God's Name. That is certainly not meaningless suffering.

Paul himself said of his suffering: 'Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am supplementing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions in behalf of His body, which is the church' (Colossians 1:24). He is speaking of his 'sufferings for your sake.' Paul's suffering was not mere misfortune—it was purposeful, 'for your sake,' indicating that his suffering served the reconciliation of the church in Colossae. He is not completing what Jesus lacked—certainly not—but his wording shows how deeply connected his suffering is to the reconciling suffering of Jesus.

PETER

He too suffered greatly after being sent as an apostle for the sake of the Gospel. On the night before Jesus' crucifixion, Peter denied Him three times, which caused him deep grief and remorse. After Jesus' resurrection, He met Peter at the Sea

of Galilee. They shared a meal of bread and fish, and Jesus reconciled with Peter. 'Do you love Me?' Jesus asked him three times. Each time, Peter received the command: 'Shepherd My sheep'

(John 21:16). Then Jesus said something remarkable about the suffering Peter would face: 'Truly, truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to put on your belt and walk wherever you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will put your belt on you, and bring you where you do not want to go.' Jesus said this to signify the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God (John 21:18–19). Peter was called to go and proclaim the Gospel so that many would be saved through faith in Jesus. The

'stretching out of his hands' refers to the crucifixion Peter would later endure in Rome. According to tradition, he was crucified and buried there, and St. Peter's Basilica was built over his grave. Peter's suffering was part of the proclamation of the Gospel and the salvation of many. His message and his suffering also served to glorify God.

The suffering of these individual Jews, the suffering of the Jewish people as a whole, and the suffering of Christ have something in common

THE JEWISH PEOPLE

All of the above-mentioned men were Jews and part of the Jewish people. In their being rejected and suffering, they served the God of Israel. The suffering of these individual Jews, the suffering of the Jewish people as a whole, and the suffering of Christ have something in common. Almost every nation on earth has at some point endured oppression and suffering. But no nation or people has such a long history of discrimination, persecution, and pogroms as the Jewish people—from Pharaoh in Egypt, Haman in Persia, the Romans, countless medieval pogroms, the Holocaust under Nazi Germany, to jihadist attacks and wars since the reestablishment of Israel

in 1948. In this, the Jewish people are absolutely unique. It all relates to Israel's election as God's chosen people and its purpose—and that of its Messiah—for the salvation of the world.

CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY

The psalmist writes: 'They divide My garments among them, and they cast lots for My clothing' (Psalm 22:18). This is an unmistakable prophetic reference to the death of Jesus, when Roman soldiers cast lots for His robe. Interestingly, Jews have also been repeatedly robbed of their property throughout history: during the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles, during the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70 CE, and the subsequent diaspora; during countless pogroms and expulsions in the Middle Ages; during the Holocaust; and during the expulsion of 850,000 Jews from Arab countries after 1948. The parallel with what happened to Jesus on the cross is unmistakable.

COUNTED AMONG THE CRIMINALS

The evangelist Mark writes about Jesus' crucifixion: 'They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. And the Scripture was fulfilled which says: And He was counted with the transgressors' (Mark 15:27–28). This fulfills Isaiah 53, where the Servant of the Lord is said to be 'counted with the transgressors, yet He Himself bore the sin of many' (Isaiah 53:12). Jesus was falsely accused and counted among transgressors.

This immediately brings to mind the history of the Jewish people. Their persecution and suffering have always been accompanied by false accusations: that the Jews killed Christ, poisoned Europe's wells, used the blood of Christian children to make matzah, pierced the host with nails to crucify Christ again, and so on. These are the well-known blood libels. Today, Israel is falsely

accused of apartheid, colonization, occupation, oppression, and even genocide. Israel and the global Jewish community are, along with their Messiah Jesus, 'counted among the transgressors.' This is particularly evident every year at the UN General Assembly, where Israel receives most of all condemnatory resolutions, even more than Russia, North Korea, and Iran combined. The international community quite literally counts Israel among the transgressors. What is remarkable is that Isaiah connects being 'counted among the transgressors' with bearing 'the sin of many'—a clear redemptive and reconciling element. Isaiah often speaks of the Servant of the Lord, and sometimes this refers to Israel, other times to the Messiah, and occasionally the lines blur.

FIRSTBORN

Paul writes that Jesus is the 'firstborn of all creation' (Colossians 1:15). In Exodus 4, the Lord says of His people Israel: 'Thus says the Lord: Israel is My son, My firstborn' (Exodus 4:22). So, both Israel and Jesus are God's Son and share a unique status as firstborn or only begotten. There remains a distinction, of course—Jesus

was without sin, while Israel is not. Yet just as the evil of the world came unjustly upon the innocent Jesus, so too has evil been wrongly directed at Israel and the Jewish people throughout history. This element of vicarious suffering connects Jesus and His Jewish people. As the Servant of the Lord, both bear great suffering for which they are not to blame. While Israel and the Jewish people are not

without sin, their centuries-long suffering is not related to their sin but to their calling as God's chosen people—as God's firstborn son. Within that lies a reconciling element, the depth of which we may never fully grasp.

The international community quite literally counts Israel among the transgressors

God's blessed people

SERMON OUTLINE

**'You shall not
curse the people,
for they are blessed;'
'Behold, a people
that lives in isolation,
and does not consider itself
to be among
the nations.'**

**Numbers 22:1–12,
23:7–10**

REV. JAAP DE VREUGD

1. The Scripture reading tells part of the story of Balaam, that remarkable pagan prophet. He is hired to curse Israel – but he cannot help but bless them.

There is a Moabite king, Balak, who is terrified of Israel and most of all of the God of Israel. He has heard the stories of what the God of that people had done in Egypt. His pagan mind devises a brilliant idea: he will call upon a well-known occult prophet to curse Israel – to use his magical incantations to separate Israel from its God, so that it will be weak and powerless. For that is the intention. Balaam must use his magical powers to force the God of the people of Israel to stop giving His help to His people.

2. 'You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed!' The word of God Himself! Does that not stand like a bow over the entire history of Israel? God spoke those famous words to Abram when He called him: I will make you into a great nation and bless you, and make your name great, and be a blessing! And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

That is why Balaam cannot help but bless, whatever his employers say or do. It would be almost amusing if it were not so serious to see how all attempts to curse fail! Israel, God's blessed people.

3. How different the course of history would be if church leaders, theologians and ordinary

Christians and political leaders alike would allow themselves to be influenced by the pagan prophet Balaam! Unfortunately, cursing and condemnation is what Israel all too often has to endure.

It is shocking every time you see the blood-red line of anti-Jewish statements and sentiments. A single example: 'Let us have nothing in common with the despicable Jewish gang' (Council of Nicea). The Church Father Chrysostom: 'The Jews are worse than demons: they are predatory, greedy, deceitful, they are a common scourge and disease for the whole world.' And so it goes on through the centuries. The massacres of the Crusaders, the burning at the stake of the Inquisition, Luther's anti-Semitic outbursts, the pogroms in Eastern Europe, and ultimately the hell of Auschwitz. The night of the Holocaust – and behind it, that whole history of cursing and condemnation.

4. But even through that immense depth, it proved to be true: God did not curse His people; the LORD did not revile them. For when it seemed impossible to human beings, Israel turned out to be very much alive; it developed unprecedented new vitality, it built a state and a society in the midst of hostility and threat, it received hundreds of thousands of new immigrants from all over the world, it survived several wars – for who shall curse what God does not curse; who shall revile what the LORD does not revile! Yes, even today there are those who curse and revile. Israel has been faced with a brutal terror war – but prominent leaders, opinion makers, NGO's and even churches exploit old antisemitic rhetoric disguised as criticism of Israel's conduct.

5. Could it have something to do with what we read in the sequel: 'Behold, a people that dwells alone and does not count itself among the nations'? A striking expression used by Balaam. A unique people. A people with a special position. This indicates Israel's special place among the nations of this world. It is precisely this special place that could be the cause of the reactions of cursing and condemning from

those around them! The nations, the powers, and behind them the power of darkness cannot bear that God has given this people a unique position. Antisemitism is the reaction of the gentile world to God's election of Israel. At its core, it is hatred against the God of Israel and His choice.

6. God has chosen Israel. Why? Election always serves a specific purpose. Through you, all the families of the earth will be blessed! That is what it is all about: the separated and holy people being a blessing to all families. Israel receives the knowledge of the one living God of heaven and earth – and is a sign and witness of this among the peoples of this world. People of the Torah, people of the priests and prophets, people of the Messiah, people of the apostles – people of the one God! Intended, therefore, to let the light of God and His service and His holy commandments and promises shine in this world. That is the calling of Israel.

7. We believe that this calling is concentrated and intensified in Him whom we know as the Son of the Father, Jesus our Lord, who fulfils this calling – and who is therefore so closely connected to His people. And so it cannot be otherwise: whoever is connected to Jesus is connected to His people. If there are people in this world who show solidarity with Israel, then it must be Christians above all! For God has also linked our salvation to the people who dwell alone, and to the Messiah who was born of that people. Anyone who, as a church or as a Christian, gives up the unbreakable bond with Israel falls back into paganism.

8. What a rich, deep and blessed truth it is: who shall curse what God does not curse; who shall condemn what God does not condemn? Balak and the prince of darkness did not succeed. Hitler did not succeed; Hamas will not succeed. God will achieve His purpose. If even the pagan, occult prophet Balaam must bless Israel against his will, then we can firmly believe that the Lord will achieve His purpose.



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