

The Last Supper in Matthew

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The Synoptic Gospels and 1 Corinthians provide a reliable tradition of the memorable words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper. A comparison of these four accounts reveals the most notable detail in Matthew's account: Jesus' blood of the new covenant is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. This saying over the cup explains Jesus' death according to Isaiah 53 and Jeremiah 31, while its wording has been influenced by Exodus 24. In the context of Matthew's Gospel, the three themes of prophet, righteous sufferer, and new community anticipate the Last Supper account.

Key Words: Last Supper, Matthew's use of the OT, forgiveness of sins, blood

The Church has from its inception recognized the Last Supper held by Jesus with his disciples as the model for its own celebration of the Lord's Supper.¹ A number of scholars in recent research understand the Last Supper as offering insight into the significance of Jesus' death. Frederick Dale Bruner calls the Last Supper "tactile Word," for in it is "Jesus' most careful verbal and visual definition of what his death means."² N. T. Wright calls it "a deliberate double drama," for Jesus' meal with his disciples "fused the great story [of Passover] together with another one: the story of Jesus' own life, and of his coming death."³ The brief narrative, a rich complex of ideas consisting of simple actions and sayings, offers deep insight into how

1. The Lord's Supper is variously named in accordance with several NT texts: "Holy Communion" (1 Cor 10:16); "Lord's Supper" (1 Cor 11:20); "Breaking of Bread" (Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35; 1 Cor 10:16); "Eucharist" (1 Cor 10:16; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24; cf. Did. 9:1, 5). This article will use "Last Supper" to refer to the meal Jesus shared with his disciples and "Lord's Supper" to refer to the Church's celebration.

2. Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew*, vol. 2: *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28* (Dallas: Word, 1990) 961, 956.

3. N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 2, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 554.

"Jesus saw himself as fulfilling several different Old Testament types simultaneously."⁴

Others disagree. If, as they maintain, the reliability of the tradition as recorded in the NT lies suspect, then one may question the possibility of recovering anything of the original event, much less the words spoken by Jesus and their meaning.⁵ However, such a skeptical view of the Last Supper tradition seems unwarranted. The tradition, which is found in Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; and Luke 22:15-20 also appears in 1 Cor 11:23-25. In 1 Cor 11:23, Paul, using rabbinic terminology for passing on authoritative teaching (παραλαμβάνω and παραδίδωμι), refers to a tradition which came from the Lord himself. Since Paul reminds the Corinthians that he had already told them of this, the tradition at least goes back to the establishment of the church in Corinth around AD 51.⁶ Joachim Jeremias argues on linguistic grounds that such traditions received by Paul could not have been formulated by Paul himself.⁷ Most likely he received these traditions from the churches he had formerly persecuted, in particular the churches around Damascus, where for three years he preached the gospel before going up to Jerusalem.⁸ During his fifteen-day visit with Peter and James, Paul would have had opportunity to confirm such traditions, including the words over the bread and cup, "whose antiquity approaches that of the early kerygma."⁹

A comparison of the four accounts which record the Last Supper suggests that they contain two traditions concerning the Last Supper: Matthew/Mark and Luke/1 Corinthians. Both traditions speak impressively to the origin of Jesus' words and actions, yet the problem of ascertaining the original wording of Jesus' sayings remains difficult. Wright offers two reasons for this difficulty.¹⁰ One, the Gospels and 1 Corinthians have translated what was spoken in Aramaic

4. I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980) 89.

5. Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1993) 118.

6. Such a dating is based on the inscription for the governorship of Gallio in relation to Acts 18:12-17.

7. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (trans. Norman Perrin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 101.

8. Gal 1:11-24. See William R. Farmer, "Peter and Paul, and the Tradition concerning 'The Lord's Supper' in 1 Cor 11:23-26," in *One Loaf, One Cup: Ecumenical Studies of 1 Cor 11 and Other Eucharistic Texts* (ed. Ben E Meyer; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1993) 36; see also Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (ed. Jurgen Roloff; trans. John E. Alsup; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-82) 1.214.

9. Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 100.

10. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 559.

into Greek. Two, the early church reused and rephrased the words in their celebration of the Lord's Supper. This retelling of the Last Supper in the life of the early church introduced certain variations; however, the events and words used were those which were memorable:¹¹ Each of the four Last Supper accounts, then, may preserve various and primitive features of the original form.¹²

In general the four accounts share a number of common "constitutive elements."¹³ Regarding the setting, the meal occurs in the evening before Judas betrays Jesus but in the prospect of God's kingdom; it also occurs within a Passover setting¹⁴ and anticipates Jesus' death. Regarding the characters, Jesus shares the meal with his disciples but promises a covenant for a multitude of unnamed people who are not present at the meal. Regarding what was done, Jesus takes bread and speaks a blessing; he breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples. He also takes a cup and gives thanks; he gives it to the disciples as well. Regarding what was said, Jesus addresses four statements to the disciples: the word concerning the bread, the word concerning the cup, the command for repetition, and the saying about drinking the fruit of the vine. In all four accounts, the most firmly attested part of the tradition is "this is my body."¹⁵

The majority of the features appear in the account of the Last Supper in Matt 26:26-29, suggesting that it also contains a reliable

11. William R. Farmer, "Reflections on Isaiah 53 and the Christian Origins," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. William H. Bellinger Jr., and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1998). If, as is discussed below in n. 14, the Last Supper occurs within the context of a Passover meal, then it is likely that the NT texts capture only those actions and expressions of Jesus which are conspicuous and go beyond the normal ritual sequence of Passover. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith* (trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993) 67. For a description of the feast of Passover, see Marshall, *Last Supper*, 21-23, 180.

12. *Ibid.*, 38. Marshall (p. 45) does attempt to reconstruct the development of the sayings from Matthew/Mark to Luke/Paul based on three reasons: Luke/Paul soften the harder saying about blood, make clearer reference to the new covenant from Jer 31:31, and offer "a theological elaboration" on the reference to Exod 24:8.

13. Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The Witness of the New Testament* (trans. Matthew J. O'Connell; New York: Paulist, 1987) 50-51.

14. Mark 14:12-16 and Luke 22:7-13 state that it is a Passover meal; however, John 13:1; 18:28; and 19:14 indicate that Jesus died before the Passover meal. Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 559) notes that the date, preparation, words of Jesus, and other incidental details all suggest that the Last Supper was in some sense a Passover meal. Following Jeremias (*Eucharistic Words*, 41-62), Marshall (*Last Supper*, 59-61) argues that the Last Supper was a Passover meal and concludes (p. 75) that "Jesus held a Passover meal earlier than the official Jewish date, and that he was able to do so as the result of calendar differences among the Jews." See also Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith*, 62-63.

15. Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24. The RSV is used throughout unless otherwise noted.

tradition of Jesus' last meal with his disciples. However, Matthew's account has often been neglected in treatments of the Last Supper.¹⁶ This presumably has occurred for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the assumption of the two-document hypothesis.¹⁷ The purpose of this study, then, is to give extended discussion to Matthew's account of the Last Supper. In particular, it will consider Matthew's account in comparison to the Last Supper traditions as found in the Synoptic Gospels and 1 Corinthians, examine the OT antecedents to the account in Matthew, and study the Last Supper passage within the context of Matthew's Gospel.

THE LAST SUPPER TRADITION IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Four accounts in the NT record the Last Supper: Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; and 1 Cor 11:23-25. The accounts show a variety of similar features. All four mention the bread (ἄρτος). All four indicate that Jesus broke (ἔκλασεν) the bread. Each account records that Jesus spoke (λέγω) concerning the bread, identifying it with his body (τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα); 1 Cor 11:24 differs from the Synoptic Gospels only by the placement of the first-person possessive pronoun (τοῦτό ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμά μου). All four also mention the cup (ποτήριον) and record that Jesus spoke concerning it. In Matt 26:28 and Mark 14:24, Jesus identifies the (content of the) cup with his blood of the covenant (τοῦτο ἐστὶν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης). In Luke 22:20 and 1 Cor 11:25, Jesus identifies the cup with the new covenant in his blood (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου).¹⁸

The Synoptic and Pauline accounts also show various divergent features. Most notable is Luke 22:15-18. These verses contain a clear reference to the meal as a Passover, a double promise that Jesus will not eat nor drink until the kingdom of God comes, and actions related to a cup taken before the supper. Both Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor 11:24 contain an additional statement (τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον)¹⁹ and an admonition (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν) related to the bread. 1 Cor 11:25 also relates a similar admonition for the cup (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡς ἅκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν). In contrast to Luke's

16. For example, Léon-Dufour (*Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*) does not include a chapter on Matthew, and Marshall (*Last Supper*, 33) treats Matthew's account as a slight revision of Mark's.

17. William R. Farmer, *The Gospel of Jesus: The Pastoral Relevance of the Synoptic Problem* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 52-63.

18. 1 Cor 11:25 includes the verb and has the possessive adjective (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι).

19. 1 Cor 11:24 does not contain the participle.

account, Matt 26:29 and Mark 14:25 place last Jesus' promise not to drink from the fruit of the vine until he drinks it in the kingdom of his Father.²⁰

The comparison of the four accounts of the Last Supper reveals several unique details in Matthew's account. It makes explicit the subject of the first verb (ὁ Ἰησοῦς) and the indirect object of the fourth verb (τοῖς μαθηταῖς).²¹ A command to eat the bread follows the command to take it (λάβετε φάγετε). The statement about the cup offers the reason (γάρ) for these commands; the cup is Jesus' blood of the new (καινῆς)²² covenant which is poured out for (περὶ) many for the forgiveness of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν). The promise not to drink concerns this (τούτου) fruit of the vine; but Jesus will drink again with his disciples (μεθ' ὑμῶν) in his Father's kingdom (ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου).

In a fashion similar to the Jewish paterfamilias, Jesus makes specific action and interprets the bread for his disciples. He takes bread; he

20. This statement in Matthew and Mark is almost identical. Matthew has ἄρτι, while Mark has οὐκέτι. Matthew refers to the kingdom τοῦ πατρὸς μου, while Mark refers to the kingdom τοῦ θεοῦ. Also, Matthew has the additional words τούτου and μεθ' ὑμῶν.

21. Matthew uses Jesus' name more often than any other evangelist, over 150 times. Taken with the μου in 26:29, his name underlines Jesus' role during the Last Supper. Matthew also emphasizes the disciples who will share in the promises which Jesus makes; they are mentioned explicitly in 26:26 and with the second-person pronoun in 26:29.

22. Generally, the omission of καινῆς is favored based on the strength of three witnesses (P³⁷ & B). While A and B date to the fourth century, P³⁷ dates to the late third century. Yet, the classification of P³⁷, which contains only Matt 26:19-52, remains difficult. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (trans. Erroll F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 98, designate it as category I, while Philip Wesley Comfort, *Early Manuscripts and Modern Translations of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 46, calls it a "free" text. To this external evidence is added the tendency toward harmonization. For example, Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 54, comments about the variant: "The word καινῆς has apparently come from the parallel passage in Luke (22.20); if it had been present originally, there is no good reason why any one would have deleted it."

However, it is altogether possible that a scribe unintentionally omitted καινῆς because of homoeoteleuton. Since all three words (τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης) have similar endings, the scribe might have skipped from the last letter of τῆς to the last letter of καινῆς. The external evidence suggests the likelihood of this error, since the omission appears almost exclusively among Alexandrian witnesses. All three text-types and a number of unclassified witnesses support the reading τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης, and at least ten of these witnesses come from the third and fourth centuries! Such reasoning agrees with Robert Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel* (NovTSup 18; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 58: "The insertion of καινῆς is better supported in Mt than in Mk and in view of the later allusion to Jer 31 (omitted in Mk) may be genuine."

blesses and breaks it. Then, he gives it to his disciples. Following two commands: "Take, eat; this is my body,"²³ Jesus identifies his body with the bread. In the NT, σῶμα generally refers to "the physical body of persons, animals, or plants, either dead or alive" or metaphorically to "a person as a physical being, including natural desires."²⁴ In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, (σῶμα appears in the former sense.²⁵ In the passion narrative, Matthew uses σῶμα four times in reference to Jesus (Matt 26:12, 26; 27:58-59); each time it carries overtones of his death. Clearly in 27:58-59, it refers to his dead body, and 26:12 connects the perfume poured on his body with his burial. Likewise, the saying over the bread in 26:26 describes "the person of Jesus as destined for death."²⁶

In the same manner, Jesus acts and speaks in relation to the cup. He takes a cup and gives thanks. Then, he gives it to his disciples. Following the command for all of the disciples to drink from the cup, Jesus identifies his blood with the cup.²⁷ In the NT, αἷμα may refer to the red fluid within the body's circulatory system; however, it more often has metaphorical connotations. It may denote "the death of a person, generally as the result of violence or execution."²⁸ While Matt 23:30 uses it in reference to the death of the prophets, Matt 27:4, 24-25 uses αἷμα for Jesus' death. This metaphorical corollary is especially true when αἷμα is found with ἐκχύνω in 23:35 and 26:28. Thus, in his saying over the cup, Jesus also speaks of his violent death.

Unlike the saying over the bread, the cup-saying in Matthew has further clarification: "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."²⁹ Blood is modified by the genitive of product διαθήκης. In the Bible a covenant is "something God established in order to place people in a particular relationship to himself."³⁰ This agreement between God as sovereign and people

23. Matt 26:26.

24. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 1.95, 105.

25. Matt 5:29-30; 6:22-23, 25; cf. Matt 10:28; 27:52.

26. Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 120.

27. For the Jewish prohibition against drinking blood, see Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14; 19:26; cf. Acts 15:20, 29. Cf. 2 Sam 23:13-37, where David identifies the water brought to him by three of his mighty men as their blood and he refuses to drink it.

28. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1.265. Likewise, ποτήριον can serve as a metaphor for suffering and even death. See Matt 20:22-23; 26:39.

29. Matt 26:28.

30. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1.219. For a brief description of the biblical theology of covenant, see Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 141-42.

as vassals involves promises from God and fidelity from the people. The common understanding of the phrase, then, is that Jesus' approaching death affects the renewal of God's covenant with people.³¹

The expression "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" suggests that Jesus' death has significance for more than just the disciples. While blood draws attention to Jesus' violent death, ἐκχύνω and περί carry sacrificial connotations.³² The provision for atonement in Lev 17:11 recognizes that blood is the bearer of life and that blood poured out is "the life that is sacrificed."³³ Jesus' violent and sacrificial death benefits not only the disciples but also "many." Similar to Semitic languages which lack a word for "all," the NT regularly uses πολλοί, not in an exclusive sense (many but not all), but in an inclusive sense (all consisting of many), meaning "the totality of those for whom he died."³⁴ Moreover, this passage from Matthew "looks upon Jesus' death as a new covenant in which sins are forgiven,"³⁵ as anticipated in Jer 31:31-34!

OLD TESTAMENT ANTECEDENTS TO MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT

Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospels, makes frequent and significant use of the OT. The use of πληρόω, γέγραπται, and the aorist passive participle of λέγω makes this clearly evident.³⁶ However, explicit citation through the use of an introductory formula is only one way in which the Jewish interpreters in general and Matthew in particular refer to the OT. Douglas Moo discusses several citation procedures used in late Judaism: linguistic influence, explicit quotations,

31. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 560. Because of Jesus' death, people will have communion with God in his reign. In this way, διαθήκης correlates with a more frequent phrase in Matthew: "the kingdom of heaven." Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 226. Outside the Gospels, as in Rom 5:9-10, "his blood" refers to Jesus' death and implies its saving significance.

32. The LXX translates sin offering (חטאת) with περί ἁμαρτίας over twenty-five times in Numbers. See Num 6:16; 7:16, 22, etc. Also, while Matthew uses περί and the other three accounts of the Last Supper use ὑπέρ, both words can indicate benefaction. See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1.802-3. Cf. 1 Cor 1:13; Gal 1:4; 1 Tim 2:1; Heb 5:3; 1 Pet 3:18.

33. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1.219.

34. Marshall, *Last Supper*, 149. Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 228, identifies the "many" as "the godless among both the Jews and the Gentiles." Cf. John 6:51.

35. Frank J. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies: Interpreting the Synoptics through Their Passion Stories* (Theological Inquiries; ed. Lawrence Boadt; New York: Paulist, 1986) 93.

36. See πληρόω in Matt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54; 26:56; 27:9. See γέγραπται in Matt 2:5; 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31. See ῥηθέν/ῥηθείς in Matt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 22:31; 24:15; 27:9.

implicit quotations, allusions, structural style, conceptual influence, and summaries of events.³⁷ The Last Supper account in Matthew does not contain an introductory formula of any kind. Yet, does it refer to the OT? If one suspects so, can this be reasonably confirmed?

In his *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Richard Hays has suggested seven questions/criteria for discerning the presence of OT "echoes" in Paul.³⁸ One, is the source available to the writer and/or his readers? Two, how explicit or "loud" is the echo; does it have a degree of verbal repetition or formal prominence? Three, how often does the writer allude to the same OT passage? Four, how well does the echo fit the theme of the NT passage? Five, could the writer have intended the effect of the alleged echo? Six, have other readers in the history of interpretation heard the same echo? And seven, does the proposed intertextual reading enhance the reading of the passage? Succinctly listed the seven criteria are availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation, and satisfaction. Perhaps what Hays has outlined could also aid the interpreter in identifying the presence of OT references in the Last Supper account in Matthew.

In Matthew's account, one initially notices the phrase "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" in Matt 26:28. Several scholars say that this appears to echo Isa 53:11-12.³⁹ The fourth Servant Song, Isa 52:13-53:12, describes in detailed, personal imagery an individual who makes vicarious, universal atonement.⁴⁰ The Song begins and ends with the exaltation of the Servant; in between it describes the Servant's rejection and atoning sacrifice.

Matt 26:28 shares several verbal similarities with the LXX text of Isa 53:11-12. Most notable are the words πολλοῖς/πολλούς and ἁμαρτίας. The cup-saying also shares conceptual similarity with παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον, although Matthew uses "poured out" as does the Hebrew הֵעָרָה לְמִוְתָּהּ נַפְשׁוֹ. While the Servant pours out his life, Jesus pours out

37. Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983) 17-22.

38. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 29-31; see also idem, "Criteria for Identifying Allusions and Echoes of the Text of Isaiah in the Letters of Paul," paper read at the Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins Conference (Baylor University Press, 1995). Farmer ("Reflections on Isaiah 53") uses only two criteria: verbal and conceptual similarity.

39. Farmer, "Reflections on Isaiah 53"; Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 73; Marshall, *Last Supper*, 43; Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith*, 72.

40. Moo, *Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, 81-82. The identity of the Servant is difficult. Except for Isa 49:1-6 and 50:4-9, where the Servant speaks in first person, the Songs usually refer to the Servant in corporate terms. Thus, the Servant acts corporately, as one for the many. See Scott McCormick, *The Lord's Supper: A Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 54-56.

his blood. Semantically, the two words "life" and "blood" are closely related, since life resides in the blood.⁴¹ So, to pour out blood is to pour out life. Matthew makes one explicit quotation from Isa 53:4 in Matt 8:17, and several passages either allude to Isaiah 53 or reveal a conceptual influence upon it.⁴² Other NT writers explain Jesus' death using Isa 53:11-12.⁴³ Thematically, the texts in Matthew present Jesus as the Servant who heals diseases and proclaims justice and as the Son of Man who gives his life as a ransom for many. In applying Isa 53:12 to himself, Jesus assumes the part of the suffering Servant and announces his approaching death as "a vicarious, once-for-all sacrifice."⁴⁴ In light of the seven criteria, the text likely meets all of them for Isa 53:11-12.

The wording "for the forgiveness of sins" also echoes Jer 31:34.⁴⁵ In the context of Jer 31:31-34, the Lord promises to make a new covenant with Israel and Judah, a covenant unlike the one made at Sinai. The Lord will place his law in the minds and hearts of his people. This "new covenant"⁴⁶ will bring knowledge of the Lord and forgiveness of sins. Jer 31:32 specifically contrasts this "new covenant" with the one made in Exod 24:8, for the new covenant relates to what Jeremiah later calls "an everlasting covenant."⁴⁷

The Hebrew text of Jer 31:34 reads לְעֹנָם וְלִחַטָּאתָם לֹא אֶזְכֹּר עוֹד אֶסְלַח. The wording of the verse in the LXX (Jer 38:34 = 31:34 in the MT) differs slightly: ἰλεως ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἔτι. The LXX translates "I will forgive" as "I will be merciful." In this regard, Matthew's use of "forgiveness" corresponds more precisely with the Hebrew text.⁴⁸ Also, the LXX uses the word διαθήκη four times in Jer 38:31-34 = 31:31-34. In addition, the words καινῆς διαθήκης make a clear reference to Jer 31:34.⁴⁹ Matthew's Gospel makes explicit reference to Jer 31:15 in

41. Lev 17:11. Léon-Dufour (*Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 154) agrees: "the word 'blood' replaces the 'soul' or 'person' of Isaiah's poems."

42. Matt 2:23 to Isa 53 2; Matt 20:28 to Isa 20:28; Matt 26:24 to Isa 53:9; Matt 26:63; 27:12, 14 to Isa 53:7; Matt 26:67 to Isa 53:5; Matt 27:28 to Isa 53:12; Matt 27:39–43 to Isa 53:4; Matt 27:57 to Isa 53:9.

43. See Rom 5:19; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24.

44. McCormick, *Lord's Supper*, 58. R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 369, writes, "So the whole idea of vicarious suffering for the sins of God's people which runs throughout Isaiah 53 underlines these words."

45. Otfried Hofius, "The Lord's Supper and the Lord's Supper Tradition: Reflections on 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25," in *One Loaf, One Cup: Ecumenical Studies of 1 Cor 11 and Other Eucharistic Texts* (ed. Ben F. Meyer; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1993) 99; Marshall, *Last Supper*, 100; Matera, *Passion Narratives*, 93.

46. In all the OT, the phrase "new covenant" occurs only in Jer 31:31.

47. Jer 32:40; cf. Gen 9:16; 17:7; 2 Sam 7:13; Isa 9:7; 55:3; Ezek 16:16.

48. Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, 58.

49. For a discussion of the textual issues relating to καινῆς, see n. 22.

Matt 2:18.⁵⁰ Heb 8:7-13 and 10:16-18 interpret Jer 31:31-34 in similar fashion, and Heb 9:22 connects the shedding of blood with forgiveness. Thematically, Matthew presents Jesus as the suffering Son of Man who has authority to forgive sins. As the healing of the paralytic validates the Son of Man forgiving sins, how much more does the death of the Son of Man "save his people from their sins"!⁵¹ The text likely meets all seven of the criteria for Jer 31:31-34.

Additionally, one notices the wording "this is my blood of the covenant" in Matt 26:28. Several scholars say that this appears to echo Exod 24:8.⁵² In the context of Exodus 24, Moses tells the people the laws he received from the Lord, after he comes down from Mt. Sinai. The people express their willingness to obey all that the Lord had instructed. Then, with sacrifice and ceremony, Moses ratifies the covenant between the Lord and the people by sprinkling half of the blood from the sacrificed animals on the altar and half of the blood on the people. Moses says about the blood, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."⁵³ Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel go up and see God; together they eat and drink.

The question then is this: does the Last Supper account in Matthew also refer to this OT passage? Except for the first-person pronoun μου, the wording in Matthew is the same as the LXX: τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης. Certainly the LXX is available to Matthew,⁵⁴ and he makes both explicit and implicit use of the Sinai account elsewhere in the Gospel.⁵⁵ Exod 24:8 is interpreted within the canon in a similar fashion in Heb 9:20; 10:29; and 13:20. Beyond the NT, this understanding of the "the blood of Christ" appears in *1 Clem.* 7:4.⁵⁶ Thematically, "blood" in Matthew emphasizes the innocent Jesus who dies for sinners.⁵⁷ As the sprinkled blood in Exodus 24 joins the Lord with the people, so the blood of Jesus brings those who drink of it into the covenant initiated

50. Possible allusions to Jeremiah include: Matt 11:29 to Jer 6:16; Matt 21:13 to Jer 7:11; Matt 23:38 to Jer 12:7; Matt 7:22 to Jer 14:14; Matt 23:38 to Jer 22:5; Matt 1:11 to Jer 27:20; Matt 11:28 to Jer 31:25; Matt 27:9-10; to Jer 32:6-9; Matt 26:65 to Jer 36:24.

51. Matt 1:21.

52. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (OTL; ed. Peter Ackroyd et al.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 511; Marshall, *Last Supper*, 43; Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith*, 72.

53. Exod 24:8.

54. Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*.

55. Matt 5:21, 27, 38; 12:2; 15:4; 19:18-19.

56. See Édouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, vol. 1: *The First Ecclesiastical Writers* (ed. Arthur J. Bellinzoni; trans. Norman J. Belval and Suzanne Hecht; New Gospel Studies 5; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1990) 16-19.

57. See especially Matt 27:4, 8, 24; cf. 1:21.

by Jesus' death. In this way, Jesus radically transforms the Mosaic formula for making a covenant!⁵⁸ Reading the text in light of the seven criteria for an echo, one notices that it potentially meets all of them for Exod 24:8.

But, the plausibility for the reference to Exod 24:8 must be considered after the discussion of another OT text. The wording "this is my blood of the covenant" may also evoke Zech 9:11.⁵⁹ Zech 9:9-10 describes the entrance of the king of Zion (i.e., the Messiah) into Jerusalem. Gentle and righteous, he comes bringing salvation and peace. Zech 9:11 explains why the Lord acts favorably toward Judah; the Lord acts on the basis of the covenant with them, the covenant sealed by the blood of sacrifice. The prophecy of Zech 9:11 likely alludes to Exod 24:8.⁶⁰

The wording of the verse in the LXX lacks the articles and connects the phrase with what precedes it with a preposition, causing "blood" to be dative: ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης. While the "volume" of the echo is slightly less overt, the recurrence of explicit quotations from Zechariah 9-14 suggests its importance for Matthew's passion narrative.⁶¹ In fact, Matthew makes greater use of Zechariah in the passion narrative than even Isaiah 53!⁶² Thematically, these texts in Matthew present Jesus as the humble king and rejected shepherd. These themes are also brought together in Heb 13:20. In this way, Jesus bloody death renews the covenant in the context of messianic victory.⁶³ Reading in light of the seven criteria, one notices that the text potentially meets all of them for Zech 9:11.

One should note the word "potentially" used in connection with Exod 24:8 and Zech 9:11, for the conclusion regarding the relationship between Matt 26:28 and Exod 24:8 (and Zech 9:11) is not as easily affirmed as most commentators suggest.⁶⁴ While the texts have a close verbal similarity, they have significant conceptual differences. Most pointedly, Jesus lifts the cup and commands his disciples to drink of

58. Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 146. While Moses sprinkles blood, Jesus commands that his disciples drink from the cup.

59. Moo, *Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, 173; Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith*, 72; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 560.

60. David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (OTL; ed. James L. Mays; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995) 60.

61. Matt 21:4-5 to Zech 9:9; Matt 26:31 to Zech 13:7; Matt 27:9-10 to Zech 11:12-13. In addition, Matt 26:15 alludes to Zech 11:12, and Matt 26:32 to Zech 13:8-9.

62. Moo, *Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, 173.

63. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 560-61.

64. While Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 560) may be correct in seeing Zech 9:11 as "equally significant" to Exod 24:8, the discussion which follows considers Exod 24:8 as primary. If it cannot be maintained that Exod 24:8 stands behind Matt 26:28, then Zech 9:11 almost certainly does not.

it, while Moses sprinkles blood upon the altar and upon the people. Certainly, Jesus could have dipped a sprig of the hyssop in the wine and sprinkled it upon his disciples, suggesting a powerful, symbolic repetition, but he does not. Also, the description of the "new covenant" in Jer 31:32 makes a clear contrast with the covenant made at Sinai: "not like the covenant which I made with their fathers." This "new covenant" of which Jesus speaks differs in that it results, not from the blood of goats and calves, but from Jesus' own blood: "this is *my blood* of the new covenant."⁶⁵ The question may be posed quite directly, "To which covenant does Jesus refer?" The answer is most undoubtedly the "new covenant" of Jer 31:31, not the covenant of Exod 24:8!

However, does such a conclusion preclude any reference to Exod 24:8 in the saying over the cup?⁶⁶ Would a first-century Jew have heard the word "covenant" without any recollection of Exod 24:8? Would a first-century Jew have heard the phrase "new covenant" in Jer 31:31-34 without any recollection of Exod 24:8?⁶⁷ Could one then not argue that the discontinuity between Jer 31:31-34 and Exod 24:8 suggests a certain relationship between them—even if by way of contrast? Could one not also argue for a similar, albeit discontinuous, relationship between Matt 26:28 and Exod 24:8? The nature of biblical intertextuality, which recognizes in a given text the presence of imbedded fragments of an earlier text by way of allusion, supports this possibility.

Craig Evans suggests that the OT has three primary functions for Jesus and the Gospel writers: legal, prophetic, and analogical.⁶⁸ Legal interpretation relates to determining the requirements for those who have faith in God. Prophetic interpretation relates to fulfilling the expectations for what will be completed in the future. Analogical interpretation relates to comparing the similarities between what has happened and what happens at a later time. This third function of the OT appears primarily in the NT as typology.

Typology views various OT persons, events, and institutions as prefiguring NT realities. E. Earle Ellis clarifies the typological relationship between the OT and NT: "An Old Testament type may stand in a positive correspondence to the new-age reality or in contrast to

65. Matt 26:28 with emphasis added; see also Heb 9:11-14.

66. While Farmer ("Reflections on Isaiah 53") does not see this conclusion as required, he does not exclude its possibility.

67. One need not look further than Heb 9:11-28 for evidence of this.

68. Craig A. Evans, "Old Testament in the Gospels," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 579.

it."⁶⁹ If a NT text is in contrast to an OT type, the NT text may allude to an OT text with "verbal similarities used (perhaps unconsciously) to express a different idea."⁷⁰

Since one of the primary themes of NT typology is covenant,⁷¹ this analogical or typological interpretation offers an explanation for the potential relationship between Matt 26:28 and Exod 24:8. Matt 26:28 presents a striking, verbal similarity to Exod 24:8, but Matt 26:28 makes a typological application.⁷² In other words, Matt 26:28 uses the same wording but expresses a different idea. The phrase "the blood of the covenant" recalls that "God's relations with his people had always depended on the sacrificial shedding of blood, and this new covenant is no exception"; in this way the Sinai covenant points forward to the new covenant promised in Jeremiah.⁷³

The preceding analysis of the saying over the cup suggests that, when he speaks these words to the disciples, Jesus intentionally explains his approaching death according to two OT texts: Isa 53:11-12; and Jer 31:31-34. In both cases, most if not all of the seven criteria for identifying echoes is reasonably met. These two OT texts form a convergence of themes relating to the covenant between God and his people and to the forgiveness of sins. It may also be argued that the saying over the cup stands in contrast to Exod 24:8 (and perhaps also Zech 9:11). A similarity in wording exists, but a typological application, evident in the word "my," presents a different idea. Jesus' actions do not mimic the sprinkling of blood by Moses, nor does he

69. E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 107.

70. Moises Silva, "Old Testament in Paul," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 634. In addition to the typological interpretation of the OT, Ellis (*Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 92) describes implicit midrash, which is "the transposition of a biblical text to a different application." Implicit midrash is found in the OT, translations of the OT, the Qumran writings, and the NT writings. He (pp. 93-94) lists several events in Jesus' life which are presented as implicit midrash: feeding the 5,000, the entry into Jerusalem, clearing the Temple, and the Last Supper.

71. Ellis, *ibid.*, 106-7.

72. Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, 57, 209, 214.

73. France, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 369. Certainly, the Last Supper accounts do not carry the typology as far as other texts in the NT which clearly associate the sprinkling of blood with the new covenant or the blood of Christ. See Heb 9:19; 10:22; 12:24; 1 Pet 1:2; see also *Barn* 5:1. "The early church considered the blood of Christ through which the New Covenant was established to be sprinkled blood (Heb 12:24) and compared it with the sprinkled blood through which the Old Covenant was established (Heb 9:20-22)." Leonard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (trans. Donald H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 155. Cf. *Tg. Ps.-J.* Exod 24:8 which ascribes atoning significance to the sprinkled blood in Exod 24:8.

reinstate the Sinaitic covenant. However, Exod 24:8 appears to exert some influence upon the description of the new covenant instituted by Jesus' blood, as the new covenant extends from "the older 'truth-world' in a 'just-as' pattern."⁷⁴

THE LAST SUPPER IN THE CONTEXT OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Having considered Matthew's Last Supper account in comparison to the other NT traditions and having examined its OT antecedents, the study now turns toward a study of the Last Supper account in the context of Matthew's Gospel. In other words, how does the Last Supper passage serve in a climactic way for themes important to the book as a whole? Or, how may one read Matthew anticipating the Last Supper? This section will present three such themes.

The first theme relates to Jesus as prophet. Numerous times in the Gospel, Matthew and Jesus cite OT scripture prophetically. Yet, in Matt 5:17 Jesus claims that he is the authoritative interpreter of the Law and Prophets. And as he finishes the Sermon on the Mount, the people confirm his prophetic authority.⁷⁵ Following the entry into Jerusalem, the crowds openly acknowledge him as "the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."⁷⁶ This recognition comes after Jesus has deliberately acted as a prophet.

In the OT, the prophets behave in bizarre and peculiar ways, according to the command of the Lord. Isaiah goes naked and barefoot for three years.⁷⁷ Jeremiah wears a linen belt and later hides it; he buys a clay jar and smashes it; he makes a yoke which is later broken off his neck; and he buys a field.⁷⁸ Ezekiel makes a model of Jerusalem; he shaves his head; and he packs his belongings for exile.⁷⁹ These prophetic actions are both figurative and efficacious. After Ezekiel shaves his hair, he interprets the figurative meaning of the action: "This is Jerusalem."⁸⁰ While Jeremiah wears the yoke, the false

74. Willard M. Swartley, "Intertextuality in Early Christian Literature," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 536.

75. Matt 7:28-29.

76. Matt 21:11; see also Matt 21:46.

77. Isa 20:1-6.

78. Jer 13:1-11; 19:1-13; 27:1-28:17; 32:6-15

79. Ezek 4:1-17; 5:1-12; 12:1-25.

80. Ezek 5:5. Léon-Dufour (*Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 125) compares this saying to the saying of Jesus over the bread: "when interpreted against this prophetic background, the verb 'to be' in the words over the bread does not establish a direct *material* correspondence between the bread and body." Rather, it represents its most natural meaning. Léon-Dufour (pp. 123-128) suggests a proper understanding of "is" includes

prophet breaks it in order to keep his prophecy from coming to pass.⁸¹

One may also see in Jesus' words and action of the Last Supper "a prophetic symbol of the significance of his death."⁸² Given how extreme prophetic actions could be, Jesus' act of identifying his blood with the cup is no more bizarre than those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Jesus claims that he will die and that his death brings a covenant on behalf of the many. He announces that his death fulfills his destiny, namely the forgiveness of sins.⁸³ His words, however, do not simply announce what is to come; as prophetic words they anticipate and even affect what is to come. Not only do they show an awareness of his coming death, "his words freely make it already a fact."⁸⁴

The second theme relates to Jesus as the righteous sufferer. When John the Baptist hesitates, Jesus explains that he has come to be baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness.⁸⁵ Righteousness is a primary concern for the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout the passion narrative, Jesus serves as a model of righteousness. He refuses to take an oath, stands silent, and refuses to save himself from crucifixion.⁸⁶ Jesus' innocence is emphasized by Judas, Pilate's wife, and Pilate.⁸⁷ By framing the account of the Last Supper with the prophecies of betrayal, Matthew stresses the sinfulness of Judas' betrayal of the innocent one and heightens the promise of the words spoken during the meal.

Perhaps most pointedly, this theme is accentuated with the use of the word "blood." Eleven times αἷμα appears in Matthew.⁸⁸ Four occurrences in Matt 23:30, 35 describe the violent death of the prophets and other righteous people from Abel to Zechariah. Their death anticipates that Jesus also suffers a violent death. Following the Last Supper passage, blood appears five times. Matt 27:4, 6, 8, 24 all connote that Jesus is innocent. In Matt 27:25, the people accept

recognition of prophetic mimesis, preformative language, and symbolic language. Jeremiah (*Eucharistic Words*, 224), on the other hand, interprets "is" rigidly as "signifies."

81. Jer 28:10-16.

82. Marshall, *Last Supper*, 85. Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 558) understands the prophetic symbolic actions in the entry into Jerusalem and at the Last Supper to indicate "that Jesus was in effect intending to replace the Temple, as the symbolic focus of Judaism."

83. Matt 1:21; 20:28. Cf. Mark 1:4 where the preaching of John the Baptist announces the forgiveness of sins. In Matthew, this is a uniqueness of Jesus' ministry.

84. Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 188.

85. Matt 3:15; cf. Matt 21:32.

86. Matt 26:64; 27:11-14, 39-44.

87. Matt 27:4, 19, 24.

88. In Matt 16:17, αἷμα appears with σάρξ; together they refer to a human being.

responsibility for his death by crying, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

In the OT, this idiom suggests guilt, responsibility, and punishment.⁸⁹ So too, the death of the innocent Jesus calls for punishment. Because of this, "the good news risks turning into condemnation."⁹⁰ In Matt 26:28, however, Jesus offers his own blood for the forgiveness of sins. The many for whom the righteous one dies receive forgiveness. In this way, Jesus "grants a forgiveness of sins before sins."⁹¹

The third theme relates to the new community established by Jesus' death. Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy showing that Jesus is Son of Abraham, the one through whom God would bless all peoples on earth.⁹² Within this genealogy, Matthew makes clear that Jesus has great significance for the Gentiles, by including the names of Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth and the appellative, Uriah's wife. The Jews are warned that they cannot merely claim Abraham as their father to ensure their place in the kingdom of heaven.⁹³ Others beyond the Jews worship Jesus and look to him in faith—the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman.⁹⁴ In accord with Isa 42:1-4, Jesus' healing ministry is directed toward the nations.⁹⁵ God has placed Gentiles on equal footing with Jews, and ultimately the disciples are commissioned to make disciples of them too.⁹⁶

This new community is also envisioned in both Jesus' teaching and his table-fellowship with sinners. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches about living as a disciple in the kingdom of heaven. Later, he interprets the implications of Peter's confession and his role in the establishment of this new community which Jesus calls "my church."⁹⁷ Jesus instructs the church to confront those disciples who sin and forgive them.⁹⁸ In the Gospel, Jesus has table-fellowship with sinners, and this provokes his opponents.⁹⁹ Jesus understands these meals in relation to the future messianic meal.¹⁰⁰ Twice Jesus feeds his disciples along with the poor and needy, and the actions of giving

89. See Lev 20:9; Josh 2:19; 2 Sam 1:16; 1 Kgs 2:37; Ezek 33:4-5.

90. Ben F. Meyer, "Expiation Motif in the Eucharistic Words: A Key to the History of Jesus?" in *One Loaf, One Cup: Ecumenical Studies of 1 Cor 11 and Other Eucharistic Texts* (ed. Ben F. Meyer; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1993) 24.

91. Bruner, *Matthew*, 2.968.

92. Matt 1:1; Gen 12:3.

93. Matt 3:8-9; cf. 12:50.

94. Matt 2:11; 8:5-12; 15:21-28.

95. Matt 12:15-21.

96. Matt 20:1-16; 28:16-20.

97. Matt 16:18.

98. Matt 18:15-35.

99. Matt 8:11-12; 11:19; cf. Isa 26:6-9.

100. Matt 8:11; 21:31; 22:1-14.

thanks, breaking bread, and giving it to his disciples mirror the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper.¹⁰¹ The Last Supper is the last of these meals, but it is profoundly different. Even at this meal, Jesus eats with sinners—one betrays him, one denies him, all desert him.¹⁰² However, at the meal Jesus explains the significance of his death in relation to the covenant which brings forgiveness of sins. Those disciples who obey the commands to take, eat, and drink receive forgiveness and salvation, that is, entrance into the "Father's kingdom."¹⁰³

CONCLUSION

By its design this study has given extended discussion to Matthew's account of the Last Supper. It has examined Matthew's account in comparison to the Last Supper traditions as found in the Synoptic Gospels and 1 Corinthians. Most prominently, Matthew's account makes explicit the promise of the forgiveness of sins as part of the covenant established by Jesus' death. The study has examined the OT antecedents to the account in Matthew, finding a likely convergence of two OT passages: Isa 53:11-12 and Jer 31:31-34. It has also considered the Last Supper passage within the context of Matthew's Gospel, noting the three themes of Jesus as prophet, Jesus as righteous sufferer, and Jesus' new community.

Certainly, the Last Supper informs the Church's celebration of the Lord's Supper "as a festival of the gospel's true symbolic realization."¹⁰⁴ Jesus applies the ritual vocabulary of the OT and applies it to his own personal action. In two prophetic symbolic actions, Jesus shares the benefits of his atoning death and invites all people into table-fellowship in God's presence.¹⁰⁵ The Church, then, ought to repeat Jesus' actions as a consequence of their meaning, for they sum up the mystery of Jesus Christ: his salvific mission and his redemptive death.

101. Matt 14:13-21; 15:29-38.

102. Matt 26:20-25, 31-35.

103. Matt 26:29. The text appears to be more liturgical in character, thereby reflecting its use among those who obey the command in Matt 28:20. Or, as Bruner (*Matthew*, 960) puts it: "It is characteristic of Matthew's Gospel of obedience that even the way to receive salvation is for the believer to obey a command."

104. Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith*, 102.

105. *Ibid.*, 99.