

THE PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

IN LUKE 23:34a

by

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The short prayer recorded in Luke 23:34a has presented a problem to the understanding of the New Testament doctrine of forgiveness. In this prayer Jesus appears to request the Father to forgive unregenerated individuals. He founds the request on the fact that these people "do not know what they are doing." Forgiveness in the passage appears to be based on ignorance with no relationship to repentance and faith.

The investigation into the meaning of this prayer first established the reliability of the text under consideration. The next step involved the analysis of terms used in the Greek New Testament to convey the idea of forgiveness. In addition the variability in the meaning of the term ἀφεσις was set forth. The popular interpretations of Luke 23:34a were investigated and the faultiness or validity of each position was pointed out. The translation of ἀφεσις as "leave" was established as a lexical, grammatical and contextual possibility and the interpretation of the passage was considered in this light. Theological implications, which present problems for the popular interpretations, were found to provide no problems with the rendering of ἀφεσις in the sense of tolerance. In addition, this rendering was found to be more in line with God's historical dealings with the executioners of His Son than the forgiveness concept proved to be.

Jesus should be viewed as praying to the Father, requesting Him "to leave or allow" His executioners to carry out their act. The reason for granting this request was the ignorance which was present in the executioners' hearts.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAGD	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. Danker, <u>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</u>
<u>EvQ</u>	Evangelical Quarterly
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<u>IDB</u>	G. A. Buttrick (ed.), <u>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</u>
<u>ISBE</u>	James Orr (ed.), <u>International Standard Bible Ency- clopedia</u>
<u>KJV</u>	<u>King James Version</u>
<u>NASB</u>	<u>New American Standard Bible</u>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<u>NIV</u>	<u>New International Version</u>
<u>TDNT</u>	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <u>Theological Dic- tionary of the New Testament</u>
<u>WTJ</u>	<u>Westminster Theological Journal</u>

All English Bible quotations are from the New American Stan-  
dard Bible unless otherwise indicated.

## INTRODUCTION

The first of Jesus Christ's last seven statements during crucifixion has caused wonder in the heart of this writer for many years. This utterance, recorded only by Luke in chapter twenty-three and verse thirty-four of his Gospel, is a prayer to God the Father apparently requesting the forgiveness of the executioners of Jesus Christ. In the prayer Jesus designates ignorance as the grounds for granting the request. This causes one to question what the nature of the forgiveness prayed for is.

K. Schilder has well captured the issue which gives rise to the study.

If the word "forgive" as used in this prayer of Christ has reference to the same tremendous benefit of grace which Christ as High priest has achieved for all the elect of God, and by means of which the sinner is justified freely, how could we harmonize this word with what we read at other places in the account? How could we do that if the will of Christ should here be reaching itself out to the highest possible priestly function, a function which gives redemption and which saves the sinner from the condemnation of his sin for all eternity.<sup>1</sup>

The task of the author in this thesis has been to determine the meaning of Jesus' first prayer from the cross. Prior to the discussion of the interpretation however, three issues have been raised which are important to this study.

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<sup>1</sup>K. Schilder, Christ Crucified, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1944), p. 133.

The first issue is that of the textual reliability of Luke 23:34a, which is addressed in chapter one. This issue is raised in order to demonstrate that the textual evidence is weighty enough to warrant an extensive investigation into the meaning of the prayer.

The second issue to consider before interpreting Jesus' prayer is the range and the meaning of Greek terms used in the New Testament for forgiveness. This information, presented in chapter two, provides data essential to the consideration of the contextual meaning of ἀφεσις, and thus the intent of the prayer under analysis. Another issue which is addressed in chapter two concerns the conditions for forgiveness in the New Testament. This issue is considered in order to insure the harmony of the author's interpretation of Luke 23:34a with the teaching about forgiveness found in other passages in the New Testament.

The various interpretations of Jesus' prayer have been discussed and the author's interpretation presented in chapter three. The final chapter has provided answers to two theological problems which arose in connection with the author's interpretation and presents the conclusion of this study.

## CHAPTER I

### TEXTUAL RELIABILITY OF LUKE 23:34a

#### Introduction

The issue focused on in this chapter is whether adequate grounds exist for the recognition of Luke 23:34a as an actual statement which Jesus Christ uttered from the cross. The portion of scripture under discussion appears as follows in the third edition of The Greek New Testament published by the United Bible Societies.

[[ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἔλεγεν, Πάτερ, ἄφεσ αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασιν  
τί ποιοῦσιν.]]<sup>1</sup>

Double square brackets are used to enclose passages which are regarded as later additions to the text but which are retained because of their evident antiquity and their importance in the textual tradition.<sup>2</sup>

#### Procedure

The procedure employed in dealing with this subject is to initially present the position of those who reject the text, as stated in their own words. This is followed by an examination of four major arguments against the authenticity of the text. Each argument is answered by statements from

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Aland, ed., Matthew Black, ed., Carlo M. Martini, ed., Bruce M. Metzger, ed., The Greek New Testament, 3rd ed. (New York: United Bible Society, 1975), p. 311.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xii.

those writers who regard the text as authentic or by the author with supporting quotations.

Upon completion of the preceding investigation, the arguments for accepting the text are set forth along with comments that attempt to nullify the point. A conclusion has been drawn from this discussion.

The division of opinion concerning the reliability of Luke 23:34a is sharp. The evidence of this is seen in the discussion to which attention is now directed.

### Basis for Rejection

#### Opening Remarks

The case for the rejection of Luke 23:34a opens with testimony from prominent scholars in the field of textual criticism and New Testament literature. Westcott and Hort have written, "The documentary distribution suggests that text was a Western interpolation of limited range in early times . . . adopted in eclectic texts, and then naturally received into general currency."<sup>1</sup> "We can not doubt that it comes from an extraneous source."<sup>2</sup>

Bruce M. Metzger comments on the text by stating:

The absence of these words from such early and diverse witnesses as p<sup>75</sup> B D\* W @ ita, d syr<sup>s</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup>, bo MSS is most impressive and can scarcely be explained as deliberate excision. . . . It had been incorporated by unknown

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<sup>1</sup>F. J. A. Hort and Brooke Westcott, "Appendix-Notes on Select Reading," The New Testament in the Original Greek, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brother, 1882), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

copyists relatively early in the transmission of the Third Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Joachim Jeremias in a footnote to an article on παῖς θεοῦ in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament states, "Luke 23:34a is missing in some of the MSS and seems to be an ancient addition resting on solid tradition."<sup>2</sup>

David Smith in the introduction to his book The Days of His Flesh, designates Luke 23:34a as a clear interpolation.

Moreover, it was the custom of readers in early days to write comments on the margin of their MSS, and it sometimes happened that a copyist, mistaking such an annotation for an accidental omission, would innocently insert it in his text. . . . Such are that precious logion included in T.R. but rejected on documentary evidence by Tisch., W. H. and R. V. . . . [He then cites] the prayer of Jesus at the crucifixion (Lk. xxiii:34).<sup>3</sup>

On the more popular level, Charles B. Williams completely removes Luke 23:34a from his translation, The New Testament--A Private Translation in the Language of the People. In the footnote to the text appears these words, "Oldest and best MSS omit 'And Jesus said . . . what they do.'"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> TDNT, s.v. "παῖς θεοῦ," by J. Jeremias, 5:713.

<sup>3</sup> David Smith, The Days of His Flesh (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), p. xix.

<sup>4</sup> Charles B. Williams, The New Testament--A Private Translation in the Language of the People (Chicago: Moody Press, 1956), p. 193.

## The Evidence

The major reasons why rejectors regard this passage as spurious can be grouped under three headings. The headings are manuscript evidence, contextual continuity and rationale for accretion.

### Manuscript evidence

The position of the rejectors under this category of argument has been phrased very well by I. Howard Marshall: "The combination of early MS evidence against its inclusion is particularly impressive, and leads to the supposition that it is a western interpolation into the text."<sup>1</sup>

One must acknowledge that a number of important manuscripts do not include this prayer (p<sup>75</sup> s<sup>avid</sup> B D\* W @ 0124 1241, it<sup>ad</sup> syr<sup>s</sup> cop<sup>sabo</sup> mss Cryril).<sup>2</sup> In addition to these 38 and 435 also exclude it and it is marked in E with an asterisk.<sup>3</sup> However, in a formidable number of manuscripts and textual sources witness is born to the authenticity of the text.

The passage is contained without a vestige of suspicion in . . . A C F G H K (even L) M (hiat OP) Q S U V Γ Δ Λ Π, all other cursives (including 1, 33, 69)

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<sup>1</sup>I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 867.

<sup>2</sup>Kurt Aland, ed. et al., The Greek New Testament, p. 311.

<sup>3</sup>F. H. A. Scrivener, A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament for the Use of Biblical Students, vol. 2 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1894), pp. 356, 357.



c e f ff<sup>2</sup> 1, the Vulgate . . . all Bohairic codices except the aforementioned two, [Lightfoot's codd 22, 26] the Armenian and Ethiopic.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous Patristic sources add their weight to the textual evidence in favor of the authenticity of Luke 23:24a. These fathers are given below.

In the II<sup>nd</sup> century by Hegesippus,--and by Irenaeus:--

In the III<sup>rd</sup>, by Hippolytus,--by Origen,--by the Apostolic Constitutions,--by the Clementine Homilies,--by ps.--Tatian,--and by the disputation of Archelaus with Manes:--

In the IV<sup>th</sup>, by Eusebius,--by Athanasius,--by Gregory Nyss,--by Theodore Herac.,--by Basil,--by Chrysostom, by Ephraem Syr.,--by ps. Ephraim,--by ps.--Dionysius Areop.,--by the Apocryphal Acta Pilati,--by the Acta Philippi,--and by the Syriac Acts of the App.,--by ps.--Ignatius,--and ps.--Justin:--

In the V<sup>th</sup>, by Theodoret,--by Cyril,--by Eutherius:

In the VI<sup>th</sup>, by Anastasius Sin.,--by Hesychius:--

In the VII<sup>th</sup>, by Antiochus mon.,--by Maximus,--by Andreas Cret.:--

In the VIII<sup>th</sup>, by John Damascene,--besides ps.--Chrysostom,--ps. Amphilochius,--and the Opus imperf.

Add to this, (since Latin authorities have been brought to the front),--Ambrose,--Hilary,--Jerome,--Augustine,--and other earlier writers.<sup>2</sup>

In addition prominent individuals in the field of New Testament literature have expressed opinions contrary to those of Westcott and Hort, Jeremias and others. Norval Geldenhuys for example asserts the following concerning the textual evidence for Luke 23:34a. "Although this prayer of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>John William Burgon, The Revision Revised (reprint ed., Paradise, PA: Conservative Classics, n.d.), pp. 84-85.

Jesus is omitted by a number of MSS (8<sup>a</sup> B D\* W @, etc.), it nevertheless occurs in most of the important MSS. (8\* A C D<sup>2</sup> L N, etc.), and there is no proof that it is not authentic."<sup>1</sup>

John William Burgon argues with fervor for the reliability of the prayer as the very words of Jesus when setting forth manuscript and patristic evidence.

And . . . what amount of evidence is calculated to inspire undoubting confidence in any existing reading, if not such a concurrence of Authorities as this? . . . We forbear to insist upon the probabilities of the case. . . . We introduce no considerations resulting from Internal Evidence. . . . Let this verse of Scripture stand or fall as it meets with sufficient external testimony, or it is forsaken thereby.<sup>2</sup>

The reason for the disagreement between scholars appears to arise from the influence of the Westcott and Hort textual theory, which in a modified form is the basis of most New Testament textual criticism today. This theory constructs a hypothetical textual transmission history which attaches a greater weight of probability to the readings which are obtained from the agreement of Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (8). J. Harold Greenlee when discussing the Westcott and Hort textual theory writes:

This is the "Neutral" text. It is represented especially in the agreement of B and 8, together with a few other witnesses. . . . The text of B, moreover, is so superior that its text must always be given close attention, and

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<sup>1</sup>Norval Geldenhuys, The Gospel of Luke, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 613.

<sup>2</sup>Burgon, The Revision Revised, p. 83.

in frequent instances the text of B is decisive over all other witnesses. The text of W-H is therefore an essentially "Neutral" or "B8" text or even a "B" text.<sup>1</sup>

The prayer of Jesus does not appear in Luke 23:34 in Codex Vaticanus (B). Therefore, against the great number of manuscripts which do attest the reading and against the "torrent of testimony from every part of ancient Christendom"<sup>2</sup> many scholars maintain that the words are spurious.

### Contextual continuity

Walter Bundy expresses the continuity argument in simple terms by writing, "It breaks the natural connection between Luke 33 and 34b."<sup>3</sup>

Another writer, Frederick Danker, expresses the continuity argument slightly differently with the statement that, "In its present position it [the prayer] interrupts Luke's sketch of the mockery and destroys the dramatic impact of the word addressed to the repentant outlaw (v. 43)."<sup>4</sup>

The continuity of Luke's thought in verses 33 and 34 does not seem more broken with the prayer when compared

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<sup>1</sup> J. Harold Greenlee, Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Burgon, The Revision Revised, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Bundy, Jesus and the First Three Gospels (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 540.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Danker, Jesus and the New Age--According to St. Luke (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1972), p. 237.

to the same passage without the prayer. As an item of evidence, Vincent Taylor remarks in his book, The Passion Narrative of St. Luke: "The quotation in Luke 23:34b [of Psalm 22:8] comes abruptly in Luke."<sup>1</sup>

The opinion Taylor has expressed is that the quotation of Psalm 22:8 in Luke's material about the passion of Jesus Christ is what breaks the continuity of thought in the passage and not the prayer. If acceptable textual criticism amounts to this type of analysis then its objectivity and textual comments are on a raging sea of mere human opinion.

The author, in reply to Bundy, grants that a connection does exist between verses 33 and 34b as is indicated by the fact that both ἐσταύρωσαν in verse 33 and ἔβαλον in verse 34 are in the third person plural and have reference to the same group of people. However, the author does not grant that the prayer Jesus voiced in 34a breaks the natural connection between these verses. Rather, "verse 34b is deliberately placed [after the prayer] to emphasize the callousness of the executioners."<sup>2</sup>

In response to Danker's argument, the prayer has not interrupted Luke's scene of mockery or destroyed the impact of the message of the repentant criminal. Rather, the prayer, in its traditional position has intentionally

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<sup>1</sup>Vincent Taylor, The Passion Narrative of St. Luke, ed. Owen Evans (London: Cambridge University, 1972), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, Luke, p. 868.

established the atmosphere Luke sought. This atmosphere was one of reverence and worship surrounding the account of Christ's passion.

The crucifixion scene becomes the crisis and culmination of worship in Luke. This is seen especially in his use of the three "last words": (1) He [Luke] includes "Father, forgive them . . ." (v. 34) and contrasts it with the mocking of the rulers and soldiers (vv. 35f); (2) he records the promise to the malefactor, offering him a place in the Kingdom (vv. 40f); (3) he adds the final cry, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" taken from Ps. 31:5, which was used by Jews in their evening prayers. When one traces the themes of these--forgiveness, the promise of salvation, commitment--one discovers the progression of salvation--history.

The major theme, of course, is the redemptive significance of the cross, but there is also an undercurrent of worship, with the first and third being prayers and the second a response to a "prayer" addressed to Him. This undercurrent of reverence pervades the entire crucifixion narrative in Luke. . . . To Luke the crucifixion was above all a scene of awesome worship.<sup>1</sup>

The prayer of Luke 23:34a, included in the gospel account by Luke's choice and located in the account by following the historical sequence of events does not interrupt the soldier scene or destroy the scene of the penitent criminal. On the contrary, the prayer contributes to the reverence and worship attitude Luke desired to convey.

#### Rationale for accretion I

Why were the twelve words of Luke 23:34a appended to the gospel record if they are not authentic? This is a problem which rejectors must face and answer. The present

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<sup>1</sup>Grant R. Osborne, "Redactional Trajectories in the Crucifixion Narrative," EvQ 51 (April-June 1979):91.

and following sections give the rationale for the accretion as set forth by rejectors of the text. "It may be of later Christian origin and carried back to Jesus himself. Its primary purpose is Christian, namely to edify."<sup>1</sup>

The proposed rationale looks primarily to the prayer uttered by Stephen in Acts 7:60 as suggestive of the first prayer from the cross: "It is more probable that the prayer uttered by Stephen (Acts 7:60) suggested a parallel utterance for the passion account."<sup>2</sup>

The research conducted by the author has failed to turn up any rejector of the text who adequately explains why it is more probable that the prayer in Luke 23:34a was drawn from Stephen's prayer, rather than Jesus' prayer providing the pattern for Stephen. As one reads the sermon Stephen delivered before his final prayer and execution (Acts 7:1-60), one wonders why it is not more probable that a man so completely devoted to Jesus Christ as Stephen demonstrated himself to be (Acts 7:51-53, 55, 59, 60) would not imitate his Lord (Acts 7:59, 60) in the death which he experiences due to his devotion to his Lord.

Additionally it should be noted that Stephen vocalized a prayer just prior to the one discussed above (Acts 7:59) which is so strikingly similar to the seventh word of Jesus from the cross (Luke 23:46), that Jesus' prayer can be

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<sup>1</sup>Bundy, Jesus and the First Three Gospels, p. 540.

<sup>2</sup>Danker, Luke, p. 237.

viewed as the pattern for it. F. F. Bruce commenting about this point writes:

As they were stoning him, he [Stephen] committed himself to his exalted Advocate with these words, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." (Acts 7:59) These words are reminiscent of our Lord's final utterance on the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).<sup>1</sup>

Later in his comments, F. F. Bruce asserts the following concerning the prayer by Stephen in Acts 7:60.

There was yet another of our Lord's utterances upon the cross that Stephen echoed. . . . Before he was finally battered into silence and death they heard him call aloud, "Lord, do not put this sin to their account." . . . Stephen had learned his lesson in the school of Him who, as He was being fixed to the cross prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).<sup>2</sup>

Another martyr of the early church, James the Just, a brother of Jesus Christ, also suffered stoning after proclaiming Christ. One can easily discern the way James followed Jesus' example in the words James spoke just prior to his execution. When confronted by the Scribes and Pharisees concerning his position about the truthfulness of Christ being the way which leads to life, James traditionally answered with these words: "And he answered with a loud voice: 'Why do you ask me about the Son of man? He is sitting in heaven on the right hand of the great power, and he shall come upon the clouds of heaven.'"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Book of the Acts, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Eusebius, Eusebius Pamphilic Ecclesiastical History, Book 1-5: The Fathers of the Church, trans. Roy J.



A similar statement to that of James was once heard from Jesus when He was confronted by the High Priest prior to His death.

The High Priest said to Him, "I charge you under oath by the living God. Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you, In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt 26:63-64, NIV).

James, when in a similar situation to that of Jesus Christ his Lord, answers in a strikingly similar manner, as indicated by a verse (Matt 26:64) which carries no textual problem. Is it an unprobable position then, to hold that when James was in a similar situation to that of his Lord, death by execution for religious convictions, that he followed his Lord's example? Note the words of James while being stoned, "I beseech thee, Lord, God and Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>1</sup>

Not a shred of historical evidence known to this author indicates that the prayer of these martyrs was carried back to the passion account. Yet historical records indicate that these men vocalized expression similar to their Lord's just prior to their death. Does it not then seem very probable that they were also imitating their Lord in their death prayers? The author and I. Howard Marshall believe that it is.

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Deferrari, ed. Roy J. Deferrari *et al.* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953), p. 127.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.



The saying could have been (James in Eusebius HE 2:23:6) modelled on Acts 7:60. . . . It is however, more likely that Acts 7:60 was modelled on this saying, so that Stephen is seen to follow the pattern of Jesus in his martyr death.<sup>1</sup>

### Rationale for accretion II

A second rationale for accretion which has been advanced is that the idea for this prayer was suggested to scribes by Isaiah 53:12. It was then inserted into the statements of Jesus on the cross. Walter Bundy writes concerning this argument: "It may have been suggested by Isaiah 53:12, 'He made intercession for the transgressors.'"<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah 53:12 was the basis for the prayer of Luke 23:34a, for Luke records the fulfillment of the prophecy given about the suffering servant of God in Isaiah 53. One reaches this conclusion by considering Jesus' remarks concerning his fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12, in Luke 22:37, "It is written: 'And he was numbered among the transgressors'; and still I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment" (NIV). Jesus clearly states here that Isaiah 53:12 is written about him and that it is reaching its fulfillment.

Alfred Plummer observes concerning this passage that "This fulfillment is not only necessary,--it is reaching its conclusion, 'is having an end.' The phrase is used of oracles and predictions being accomplished."<sup>3</sup> Soon Jesus

<sup>1</sup>Marshall, Luke, p. 26.      <sup>2</sup>Bundy, p. 540.

<sup>3</sup>Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, ICC, ed. Alfred Plummer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), p. 545.

would be fastened to a cross between two criminals (Luke 23:32-33), and the fulfillment of the first portion of Isaiah 53:12 would be reached.

Isaiah continues, "For he bore the sin of many." The Apostles Paul (2 Cor 5:21) and Peter (1 Pet 2:24a) communicate that this is what transpired as Jesus hung on the cross. The final words of Isaiah 53:12, "and he made intercession for the transgressors," reached their fulfillment when Jesus directs these words toward heaven, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Was Isaiah 53 understood by Jesus to be descriptive of his passion? The answer appears to be "yes," from Jesus' own words as shown above, and from the belief of the early Christians as indicated by Philip the evangelist's interaction with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40).

J. Jeremias, a recognized New Testament scholar, but no champion of conservative theology, is also persuaded to answer in the affirmative on this point, in regard to both Jesus' understanding of his passion and the belief of the early church. Jeremias has published in TDNT the following words, "The assertion of the sources that Jesus found the key to the necessity and meaning of His passion in Isa. 53 also enjoys a high degree of historical probability."<sup>1</sup> Jeremias also wrote the sentence below in his book New Testament Theology after previously providing the basis for his

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "παῖς Θεοῦ," by J. Jeremias, 5:715.

statement, "Thus even the earliest church, living in a Semitic-speaking milieu, was convinced that Jesus had found his suffering outlined in Isaiah 53 and thus had ascribed atoning power to his death."<sup>1</sup>

Many events in Isaiah 53 were beyond the control of Jesus to bring to fulfillment, but they were prophesied by Isaiah that they would be fulfilled in connection with the Christ's death. Jesus taught his disciples that he was fulfilling them. The early church believed that Jesus held to Isaiah 53 as the outline of his sufferings. Why then, in light of Jesus' complete illumination concerning the prophecy of His making intercession for transgressors, would He have refused to do so? It seems unlikely He would when it was completely in His power to utter these words and fulfill the prophecy. Yet, a rejector who holds to this rationale for accretion would have to believe that Jesus refused to fulfill the Isaiah 53:12 prediction.

Jesus Christ's prayer in Luke 23:34a is in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12. This is the most logical conclusion to draw from the available evidence.

### Basis for Acceptance

#### Introduction

In addition to the above responses to the major reasons for the rejection of Luke 23:34a, other facts

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<sup>1</sup>Joachim Jeremias, New Testament Theology, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 287.

indicate that the text is authentic. These facts are presented under the headings of external evidence, internal evidence and rationale for deletion.

### External Evidence

An extensive discussion concerning the manuscript testimony for and against the twelve words of Luke 23:34a was entered into under the heading "basis for rejection," subheading "manuscript evidence." The issue has been raised again here only to assert that those who accept the text hold that there is sufficient external evidence to accept the text on the basis of this evidence alone. "It is almost incredible that acute and learned men should be able to set aside such a silva of witness of every kind, chiefly because D is considered especially weighty in its omissions and B has to be held up, in practice if not in profession virtually almost impeccable."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Scrivener is correct in his evaluation; the greater number of witnesses in this instance is set aside by rejectors for the favored manuscripts of B and D. Note the following remarks of a rejector from the footnotes of his commentary, "The prayer occurs in no other Gospel and the weighty combination of B with D syr. sin and a b in in omitting ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς . . . τί ποιοῦσιν leaves it

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<sup>1</sup>Scrivener, A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament, Vol. 2, p. 356.

improbable that the words were original in the Lucan text."<sup>1</sup>  
The weight of textual evidence against this position precludes any assurance in opting for this conclusion.

### Internal Evidence

The rejectors and acceptors of the prayer in Luke 23:24a agree that the internal evidence is in favor of the validity of the text. Westcott and Hort, well known scholars in the field of textual criticism and rejectors of the text, have written this about the internal evidence of Luke 23:34a: "Few verses of the Gospel bear in themselves a surer witness to the truth of what they record than this first Word from the cross, but it need not therefore have belonged originally to the book which it is now included."<sup>2</sup>

Another rejector David Friedrich Strauss published these words.

However accordant such a prayer may be with the principles concerning love to enemies elsewhere inculcated by Jesus (Matt. v. 44) and however great the internal probability of Luke's statement viewed in this light: still it is to be observed, especially as he stands alone in giving this particular, that it may possibly have been taken from the reputed messianic chapter, Isa. liii. . . .<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Martin Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1930), p. 286.

<sup>2</sup>Hort and Westcott, The New Testament in the Original Greek, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brother, 1882), p. 68.

<sup>3</sup>David Strauss, The Life of Jesus Christ Critically Examined, trans. George Eliot, ed. Peter Hodgson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 682.

Alfred Plummer, who believes that the point concerning the textual reliability is a comparatively little matter, comments concerning Luke 23:34a that

Even more strongly than in the case xxii. 43, 44; internal evidence warrants us in retaining the passage in its traditional place as a genuine portion of the evangelic narrative. That point being quite certain. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Since rejectors acknowledge that internal evidence stands in favor of the text, no major objections against the internal evidence have been published. Therefore, quotations of internal factors from published material are all that is necessary to conclude discussion of this basis for acceptance.

The motif of forgiveness for sins of ignorance, and the thought of Jesus giving a last chance to the Jews fits in with Lucan thought.

Sayings by Jesus are found in each main section of the Lucan crucifixion narrative (23:28-31, 43, 46); the lack of such a saying at this point would disturb the pattern.

The language is Lucan.<sup>2</sup>

#### Rationale for Deletion

Rejectors were faced with the question of the reason for appending Luke 23:24a to Luke's narrative if it was not original. In a similar fashion, acceptors must face the question of why Luke 23:34a was deleted from some manuscripts if it was Lucan.

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, Luke, ICC, p. 545.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, Luke, p. 868.

The question why this word was omitted has often been answered by saying that copyists in the early centuries understood Jesus' prayer to refer to the Jews. For this reason they disregarded the saying.<sup>1</sup>

Norval Geldenhuys adds these considerations to the answer:

The reason why some copyists have omitted it must probably be sought in the fact that they looked upon the destruction of Jerusalem as proof that God had not forgiven the Jews, and they could not make it appear as if a prayer of Jesus had remained unanswered.<sup>2</sup>

Harnack emphasizes not the fact that the copyists were concerned about the answer to Jesus' prayer, but rather the anti-Jewish element gave rise to the deletion. "The words were omitted in many MSS, because they were falsely interpreted as referring to the Jews generally and this from anti-Jewish reasons became intolerable."<sup>3</sup>

The rebuttal from rejectors to the proposition that the prayer would appear unanswered has been provided by Frederick W. Danker.

It has been argued that the prayer was omitted because of a conviction that the destruction of Jerusalem was God's judgment for the crucifixion, but a similar omission does not appear in Acts 2:38-39, where forgiveness is proclaimed to Israel.<sup>4</sup>

One must note, when analyzing this rebuttal, that the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:38-39 calls the people to "repent and let each of you be baptized . . . for the

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<sup>1</sup>Simon J. Kistemaker, "The Seven Words from the Cross," WTJ 38 (Winter 1976):183.

<sup>2</sup>Geldenhuys, Luke, pp. 613-14.

<sup>3</sup>C. G. Montefiore, ed., The Synoptic Gospels, vol. 2 (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1968), p. 625.

<sup>4</sup>Danker, Luke, p. 237.

forgiveness of your sins." The situation which transpired in Acts 2:38-39 is greatly different from Luke 23:34a in the sense that Peter calls for an individual response to the message of Christ's death and resurrection, ἕκαστος ὑμῶν for the forgiveness offered (cf. Acts 2:41). About three thousand souls responded and were added to the early band of Christ's followers (Acts 2:41).

Luke 23:34a on the other hand, is a prayer offered for Christ's crucifiers and calls for no specific response to make the prayer effectual. The differences between Luke 23:34a and Acts 2:38, 39 are so great that the two statements about forgiveness cannot be viewed as comparable proclamations. Indeed the scribes would not have been compelled to view the destruction of Jerusalem as a contradiction to Peter's sermon like they would to Christ's prayer.

The rebuttal concerning the early anti-Jewish sentiments grounds for omission can be viewed as coming from the pen of Westcott and Hort, "Willful excision on account of the love and forgiveness shown to the Lord's own murderers, is absolutely incredible: no various reading in the New Testament gives evidence of having arisen from such a cause."<sup>1</sup>

One finds no convincing arguments in this rebuttal, for no other passage in the New Testament presents the Lord praying in this fashion. The fact that no other textual

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<sup>1</sup>Hort and Westcott, The New Testament in the Original Greek, p. 68.



variant is explained in this manner is not grounds for rejecting this argument as valid for the omission of Luke 23:34a in some manuscripts.

### Conclusion

The greater mass of manuscript evidence and many important manuscripts (8 A C D<sup>2</sup>) stand in favor of the reliability of Luke 23:34a. The first prayer of Jesus during crucifixion contributes to the atmosphere Luke sought to establish and is therefore in continuity with the context. The record of Stephen's and James' martyrdom for Christ gives evidence to the fact that they followed Jesus' pattern in execution rather than vice versa. Isaiah 53:12 was viewed by Jesus Christ and the early church as being the outline for Christ's passion, therefore Jesus prayed according to the outline (Isa 53:12) rather than the passage being the basis for accretion to the narrative.

Undisputably the internal evidence points to the recognition of Luke 23:34a as reliable by both rejectors and acceptors. The early believers did consider the destruction of Jerusalem as the judgment of God on Israel for their sin of crucifying the Son of God. This would appear to explain the rationale for deletion of Luke 23:34a from some manuscripts.

The above summary of the argumentation in this chapter points out the proper conclusion to the question of the reliability of Luke 23:34a. The text stands as a reliable

account of Jesus' first word from the cross and warrants investigation into its meaning.

Before moving into a discussion of the interpretation of Luke 23:34a, two other points of background material must be investigated. The points are: the range and meaning of Greek terms used in the New Testament for forgiveness and the conditions of forgiveness stated in connection with these terms. These issues are the focus of chapter two.

## CHAPTER II

### RANGE AND MEANING OF THE GREEK TERMS FOR FORGIVENESS WITH THEIR ACCOMPANYING CONDITIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the various terms used in the New Testament to express the idea of forgiveness and to consider their connotations and variability of meaning. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the New Testament conditions for forgiveness connected with the usage of each of the four Greek terms.

The range of terms employed by New Testament writers when commenting on forgiveness are: ἀφίημι, χαρίζομαι, ἀπολύω, ἐξαλείφω. The first two terms are used most frequently and will be discussed more extensively than the latter two items.

#### ἀφίημι

##### Lexical Meanings and Illustrations

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible provides this observation concerning ἀφίημι.

The commonest words for "forgiveness" in the NT are the verb ἀφίημι, "to send away" . . . and the noun ἄφεσις,

"sending away" . . . used both of God's forgiveness of sin and of man's forgiveness of his neighbor's offenses.<sup>1</sup>

However, of the 147 times the word occurs in the New Testament, only forty-five times is it in the sense of forgiveness.<sup>2</sup> BAGD sets forth the following meanings for ἀφίημι.

1. "let go, send away (literal sense), divorce (in a legal sense)."<sup>3</sup> Illustrations: a) Then Jesus (ἀφείξ) having sent away the crowds,--literal (Matt. 13:36), b) and the husband is not to divorce (μὴ ἀφιέναι) (his) wife--legal sense (1 Cor 7:11), c) compare further (Matt. 27:50; Mark 5:36; 8:13).
2. "cancel, remit, pardon."<sup>4</sup> Illustrations: a) And (ἀφεξ) forgive us our debts--debt (Matt. 6:12) b) and (ἀφῆκεν) he forgave him the loan--debt (Matt. 18:27), c) and if he should repent (ἀφεξ) forgive him--sin (Luke 17:3), d) compare further (Matt. 9:6; 1 John 1:9; Jas. 5:15).
3. "leave,--(literal sense), give up, abandon, (figurative sense)."<sup>5</sup> Illustrations: a) and the fever (ἀφῆκεν) left her, (literal) (Matt. 8:15), b) and (ἀφέντες) having left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, they went after Him, (literal) (Mark 1:20), c) also the males (ἀφέντες) having abandoned the natural use of the female (figurative) (Rom. 1:27), d) compare further (Matt. 26:44; Mark 12:12; Luke 4:39 as literal), (Matt. 23:23; Rev. 2:4 as figurative).
4. "let, let go, tolerate."<sup>6</sup> Illustrations: a) But Jesus did not (ἀφῆκεν) let him, (Mark 5:19), b) (ἀφεξ) let it

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<sup>1</sup>IDB, s.v. "Forgiveness," by W. A. Quanbeck, vol. 2, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "Forgiveness," by H. Vorlander, vol. 1, p. 700.

<sup>3</sup>BAGD, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

alone also this year (Luke 13:8), c) that (ἀφεῖς) you tolerate the woman Jezebel (Rev. 2:20), d) compare further (Matt. 15:14; Mark 11:6; John 11:48; Acts 14:17; Rev. 11:9).

W. E. Vine in Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words lists the following as renderings for the verb at various points in the New Testament.

(ἀφίημι), apo, from, and hiemi, to send, has three chief meanings: (a) to send forth, let go, forgive [illustrations--debts in Matt. 6:12; 18:27, 32, sins in Matt. 9:2, 5, 6; 12:31, 32; Rom. 4:7; Jas. 5:15; 1 John 1:9], (b) to let, suffer, permit [illustrations--Matt. 5:40; 7:4; 13:30; Mark 7:27; 15:36; John 11:48; Acts 5:38], (c) to leave, leave alone, forsake, neglect [illustrations--Mark 1:18; 8:13; 15:50; Luke 5:11; John 4:3, 28, 55; 8:29; 1 Cor. 7:11].<sup>1</sup>

As is evident from the preceding data, great variability exists for the meaning of ἀφίημι in the New Testament. The exact meaning of the term in any passage is determined by its usage and context.

### χαρίζομαι

One should note before beginning an analysis of this Greek term, that the noun form of the verb χαρίζομαι is the term χάρις, "grace," which has great significance in Christian theology. "For Paul charis is the essence of God's decisive saving act in Jesus Christ, which took place in his sacrificial death, and also of all its consequences

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 665.

in the present and future (Rom. 3:24ff)."<sup>1</sup> "The verb charizomai, like the noun, is used chiefly in connection with the decisive, gracious gift of God."<sup>2</sup> However, in Paul's writings, "The verb . . . does not have the precise sense of the noun."<sup>3</sup>

### Lexical Meanings and Illustrations

Both BAGD and The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament by Joseph H. Thayer (hereafter referred to as Thayer) identify three usages for this verb in the New Testament.

1. "to show one's self gracious, kind, benevolent."<sup>4</sup> Illustration: but to Abraham through promise God (μεχάρισται) granted it (Gal. 3:18).
2. "to give graciously, give freely, bestow, of God."<sup>5</sup> Illustrations: a) how (χαρίσεται) will he not graciously grant us all things also with Him (Rom. 8:32), b) that we might know the things (χαρισθέντα) graciously granted to us by God (1 Cor. 2:12), c) because to you (ἐχάρισθη) it was freely given concerning Christ (Phil. 1:29), d) compare further (Luke 7:21; Acts 3:14; 27:24; Phil. 2:9).
3. "to grant forgiveness, to pardon."<sup>6</sup> Illustrations: a) you (χαρίσασθαι) should forgive and encourage, (2 Cor. 2:7), b) (χαριζόμενοι) forgiving each other

<sup>1</sup>New International Dictionary, s.v. "Grace," by H. H. Esser, vol. 2, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>TDNT, s.v. "χάρις," by R. Bultmann, 2:356.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: Harper Brothers, 1889), p. 665.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

according as also God in Christ (ἐχαρίσατο) forgave you (Eph. 4:32), c) (χαρισάμενος) having forgiven us all the transgressions (Col. 2:13), d) compare further (Luke 7:42, 43; 2 Cor. 2:10; 12:13; Col. 3:13). \*The verb appears in the New Testament eleven times with reference to forgiveness. The usages are noted above.<sup>1</sup>

### ἀπολύω

#### Lexical Meanings and Illustrations

The term ἀπολύω is a compound of the verb λύω. "The Gk. word λύω 'to loose' is rich in compounds which give nuances to the basic meaning."<sup>2</sup> BAGD designates three meanings for ἀπολύω.

1. "set free, release, pardon."<sup>3</sup> Illustrations: a) Now at the feast the governor was accustomed (ἀπολύειν) to release any one prisoner to the multitude whom they wished (Matt. 27:15), b) (ἀπολύετε) forgive and you (ἀπολυθήσεσθε) shall be forgiven (Luke 6:37), c) do you not know that I have authority to crucify you and I have authority (ἀπολυσαί) to release you (John 19:10), d) compare further (Luke 6:37; Acts 3:13; 5:40; 16:35).
2. "let go, send away, dismiss, divorce."<sup>4</sup> Illustrations: a) and Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her desired (ἀπολύσαι) to divorce her privately (Matt. 1:19), b) everyone who (ἀπολύων) divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery (Luke 16:18), c) and having said these things (ἀπέλυσεν) he dismissed the assembly (Acts 19:41), d) compare further (Matt. 14:15, 22; 15:32; Mark 10:2, 4, 11; Luke 2:29; 8:38).
3. "go away--middle voice."<sup>5</sup> Illustrations: a) and disagreeing with one another (ἀπελύοντο) they departed (Acts 28:25), b) know that our brother Timothy (ἀπολελυμένον) has been released (Heb. 13:23).

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<sup>1</sup>Irvin A. Busenitz, "Divine Forgiveness: Conditions and Limitations" (Th.D. Dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1980), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>TDNT, s.v. "λύω," by O. Procksch, 2:328.

<sup>3</sup>BAGD, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

The term ἀπολύω only expresses the idea of forgiveness in one passage of the New Testament, Luke 6:37. The term "is used (here) because of the analogy of sin to debt, and denotes the release from it."<sup>1</sup>

### ἐξαλείφω

#### Lexical Meanings and Illustrations

The verb ἐξαλείφω is a "derivative from the word ἀλείφω which means to anoint and rub with oil, and so to polish by rubbing smooth."<sup>2</sup> BAGD lists two meanings for this derivative.

1. "wipe away, wipe out, erase, the basic meaning."<sup>3</sup> Illustrations: a) He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white, and in no wise (ἐξαλείψω) will I erase his name from the book of life (Rev. 3:5), b) Repent therefore and return that your sins (ἐξαλειφῆναι) may be wiped away (Acts 3:19), c) compare further (Col. 2:14; Rev. 2:14; 7:17).
2. "remove, destroy, obliterate, the more general meaning. Illustrations: a) (ἐξαλείψας) having cancelled the handwriting against us (Col. 2:14), b) Repent therefore and be converted, for the (ἐξαλειφθῆναι) blotting out of your sins (Acts 3:19).

There are five occurrences of ἐξαλείφω in the New Testament. The Acts 3:19 passage appears to be the only usage with reference to the forgiveness of sins.

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<sup>1</sup> ISBE, s.v. "Forgiveness," by William C. Mooro, vol. 2, p. 1132.

<sup>2</sup> New International Dictionary, s.v. "ἐξαλείφω," by J. I. Packer, vol. 1, p. 471.

<sup>3</sup> BAGD, p. 272.



Conditions of God's Forgiveness  
in the New Testament

Introduction

The idea of conditions for forgiveness must not be taken to mean that which man adds to what God has done in order to secure the man's forgiveness.

That sounds too much like a bargain. The experience is a personal reconciliation. Forgiveness of sin is from God's side; repentance and faith are from man's. But God has something to do with calling forth both repentance and faith.<sup>1</sup>

The necessity of repentance and faith for forgiveness by God is frequently spoken of in the literature on forgiveness.<sup>2</sup> A consideration of how both these concepts are used with the four terms for forgiveness is called for in order to determine the relationship of these conditions to Jesus' prayer for His executioners.

Repentance

Meaning of the terms for repentance

There are primarily three terms employed in the New Testament to convey the idea of repentance. The terms are

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<sup>1</sup>Morris Ashcraft, The Forgiveness of Sins (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>See Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, s.v. "Forgiveness," by W. T. Davison, p. 616; The Confession of Faith, The Presbyterian Church in the United States Board of Christian Education (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1965), p. 84; The New Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Forgiveness," by Leon Morris, p. 436; Morro, "Forgiveness," p. 1132; Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, s.v. "Forgiveness," by P. H. Monsma, vol. 2, pp. 598-99.

μετανοέω, μεταμέλομαι and ἐπιστρέφω. Μετανοέω means "to change one's mind, feel remorse, be converted."<sup>1</sup> L. Berkhof observed these characteristics of the term, as recorded in his Systematic Theology.

While maintaining that the word denotes primarily a change of mind, we should not lose sight of the fact that its meaning is not limited to the intellectual, theoretical consciousness, but also includes the moral consciousness, the conscience. Both the mind and the conscience are defiled, Tit. 1:15, and when a person's nous is changed, he not only receives new knowledge, but the direction of his conscious life, its moral quality, is also changed . . . metanoia includes a conscious opposition to the former condition.<sup>2</sup>

The meaning of the Greek term--μεταμέλομαι is much like that of μετανοέω, "(feel) regret, repent, change one's mind."<sup>3</sup> One should note, however, the use of the term "feel" in the lexicon's description of meaning. Berkhof states that "the negative, retrospective and emotional element is uppermost."<sup>4</sup> The conclusion is that the element of emotion contained in μεταμέλομαι is stronger than in μετανοέω.

The third term for repentance, ἐπιστρέφω, means "to turn in a religious-moral sense, turn around or turn back and therefore return."<sup>5</sup> "It denotes not merely a change of

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 513.

<sup>2</sup>L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), p. 482.

<sup>3</sup>Busenitz, "Divine Forgiveness," p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 482.

<sup>5</sup>BAGD, p. 301.

the nous or mind, but stresses the fact that a new relation is established, that the active life is made to move in another direction."<sup>1</sup>

The term differs from μετανοέω in the sense that "sometimes metanoëo contains the idea of repentance only, while epistrephō always includes the element of faith."<sup>2</sup> The term differs from μεταμέλομαι in regards to the element of emotion μεταμέλομαι contains.

#### Forgiveness passages and repentance

Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3. There are few passages in the New Testament which explicitly speak to the issue of the relationship between repentance and forgiveness. The first occurrence in the New Testament is seen in the preaching of John the Baptist (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). The pertinent section of the two verses read identically as follows:

κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, "proclaiming [the] baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins."

The terms μετανοίας, a change of one's mind; and ἄφεσιν, forgiveness or cancellation are connected in the preaching of John. The repentance John proclaimed was for the purpose and result of the forgiveness of sins.

John's intent was clearly not for the purpose of persuading people to go through a mere rite of baptism. The very meaning of μετανοίας, which indicates a change of

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<sup>1</sup>Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 482.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

mind prohibits this interpretation. In addition, John's follow-up message to those who were submitting to his baptism indicates the intention of his repentance preaching. "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with your repentance" (Luke 3:7b, 8a). Beyond a doubt, John saw repentance as a necessary correlary to forgiveness.

Luke 17:3, 4. The second encounter with the repentance for forgiveness proclamation for the New Testament reader appears in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. The disciples were the audience to this teaching of the Lord's recorded in Luke 17:3, 4.

Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he (μετανοήσῃ) repents, (ἄφες) forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying (μετανοῶ) I repent, (ἀφήσεις) forgive him.

In this passage Jesus communicates to his followers the continuous forgiving spirit they are to manifest. A follower of Christ is always to have the proper attitude when offended and never harbor a grudge. Nevertheless, "when anyone has sinned against a believer he (the believer) should not give him (the offender) the assurance of forgiveness before he has shown that he truly repents."<sup>1</sup> Once the offender changes his mind, the believer is commanded, Luke 17:4 (ἀφήσεις a cohortative indicative), to forgive him.

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenuys, Luke, NICNT, p. 432.

The condition here is clearly declared by the Lord. The offender must give an expression of repentance. "When this condition is fulfilled, forgiveness is to be granted."<sup>1</sup>

Luke 24:46, 47. Jesus couples repentance with divine forgiveness on another teaching occasion with His eleven disciples. The situation is the post-resurrection, Lucan account of the great commission in Jerusalem. The Lord's words are recorded in Luke 24:46, 47, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that μετάνοιαν repentance for ἄφεσιν forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

A textual variant exists in regards to the word between μετάνοιαν and ἄφεσιν. The question is whether the conjunction καὶ or the preposition εἰς was the original term.

If εἰς is the correct textual rendering, then the phrase is almost identical to Luke 3:3 and Mark 1:4 with one noteworthy exception, namely, there is no mention of baptism. Thus again forgiveness is coupled with repentance. . . . Even if one should allow the καὶ to stand, the command of Christ to preach repentance to all nations still remains. This not only places great importance upon repentance, but also suggests by implication that the acquisition of forgiveness is closely related to it. Why else the command to preach it?<sup>2</sup>

Jesus reinforced the connection and necessity of repentance for (and) forgiveness in the final words he spoke

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, Luke, p. 643.

<sup>2</sup>Busenitz, "Divine Forgiveness," pp. 88, 89.

to the foundation stones of the church. If the church has a message to proclaim, the elements of the message he proclaims lie here.

Acts 2:38. The apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost proclaims what he understood to be necessary for the forgiveness of sins, "And Peter said to them, Repent (μετανοήσατε), and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness (ἄφεσιν) of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The purpose of the author here is not to discuss the relation of baptism to forgiveness. The issue is that Peter calls for repentance as linked with forgiveness. I. Howard Marshall has written the following on Peter's response to the question of Acts 2:37.

Peter's reply sums up what was to be the standard call by Christian preachers to their audiences. It contains two requirements, which are in effect one. The first was a call to repent. . . . This echoed the preaching of John the Baptist with his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin (Luke 3:3) and of Jesus himself (Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 5; 24:47). The word indicates a change of direction in a person's life rather than simply a mental change of attitude or a feeling of remorse, it signifies a turning away from a sinful and godless way of life. So it is that here repentance is linked with baptism. Since elsewhere repentance and faith are closely linked, (20:21; Mark 1:15) it is certain that, whatever else it may be, baptism is an expression of faith.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I. Howard Marshall, The Acts of the Apostles, vol. 5 in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, general ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 80-81.

Acts 3:19a. Peter, on the occasion of the healing of the man lame from birth, again calls for repentance for forgiveness of sins. "Repent (μετανοήσατε) therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away (ἐξαλειφθῆναι)" (Acts 3:19a).

Acts 5:31. When Peter appeared before the council in Jerusalem for teaching in the name of Jesus, he connected repentance with forgiveness of sins, and designated this as the Lord's work from heaven. "He [Jesus] is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance (μετάνοιαν) to Israel, and forgiveness (ἄφεσιν) of sins" (Acts 5:31).

Acts 8:22. Peter, in a rebuke to Simon the magician again urges repentance for forgiveness. "Therefore repent (μετανόησον) of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven (ἄφεθῇσεται) you" (Acts 8:22).

Conclusion. The passages noted above are exhaustive of the New Testament passages which explicitly link repentance and forgiveness. Their wording is clear enough to establish the principle that God calls men to repentance for the forgiveness of their sins. It is instructive to observe however, that:

In one sense this is something of which man is incapable by himself, and therefore, although men can be commanded to repent, it can also be said that repentance is a gift of God (5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). It should also be

noted that it is an essential part of conversion and response to the gospel; Calvin insisted that "repentance not only always follows faith, but is produced by it" (Institutes III. iii 1), but it would be truer to say that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin.<sup>1</sup>

## Faith

### The meaning of the term

The second condition which is frequently set forth as necessary for forgiveness is that of faith. The Greek term for faith is πίστις, the noun form and πιστεύω, the verb. W. E. Vine describes the word as follows.

"(πιστεύω), to believe, also to be persuaded of, and hence, to place confidence in, to trust, signifies, in this sense of the word, reliance upon, not mere credence."<sup>2</sup>

Berkhof recognizes that in the New Testament,

There are few instances in which the word has a passive meaning, namely, that of "fidelity" or "faithfulness," which is its usual meaning, in the Old Testament, Rom. 3:3; Gal. 5:22; Tit. 2:10. It is generally used in an active sense. The following special meanings should be distinguished: (a) an intellectual belief or conviction, resting on the testimony of another, and therefore based on trust in this other rather than on personal investigation, Phil. 1:27; 2 Cor. 4:13; 2 Thess. 2:13, and especially in the writings of John and (b) a confiding trust or confidence in God or, more particularly, in Christ with a view to redemption from sin and to future blessedness. So especially in the Epistles of Paul, Rom. 3:22, 25; 5:1, 2; 9:30, 32; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8; 3:12 and many other passages.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, Expository Dictionary, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 494.



### Forgiveness passage and faith

Matthew 9:2. There are six passages in the New Testament which clearly state the connection of faith and forgiveness. The first of these passages is found in Matthew 9:2.

The incident recorded here is that of the lowering of the paralytic through the tile roof before Jesus, while He was healing people. The incident is recorded as follows. "And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith (πίστιν) said to the paralytic, 'Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven (ἀφεωνται).'"

Jesus' forgiveness of the man came as soon as He saw their faith. In other words the faith of the small band of men who carried the paralytic as well as the paralytic's faith. Their faith was demonstrated by the effort they exerted to get the paralytic to Jesus. These men were not mere sightseers or crowd followers, but demonstrated a confidence in Christ. In light of this confidence, Jesus capitalized on the situation to communicate to His audience that He had authority on earth to forgive sins. The authenticity of this authority was manifest in His authority to heal the man's physical defect (Matt. 9:4-7). The entire situation transpired through God's providential arrangement based on an expression of faith in Christ. The thrust of Christ's teaching then seems to be that of the necessity of

faith in Him, as visibly demonstrated here, for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 9:8).

Luke 7:48, 50. Another situation which Jesus employs to again reinforce the necessity of faith for forgiveness is that of a dinner engagement He had in the home of a Pharisee, Luke 7:36-50. In this event an immoral woman washes Jesus' feet with tears, dries them with her hair, kisses and perfumes them. Jesus says to this woman, who already visibly revealed by this display of love that she acknowledged forgiveness of her sins (Luke 7:45-47), "Your sins have been forgiven (ἀφέωνται)," Luke 7:48.

The basis of this forgiveness undeniably was identified by the Lord. "Your faith (πίστις) has saved you" (Luke 7:50).

Her faith in Him and in the grace of God is meant. Again we see that Jesus does not say "thy love hath saved thee," but "thy faith"--not because "faith" is a merit but because it is her faith that appropriates the forgiveness which grace bestowed.<sup>1</sup>

This does not conflict with the need for repentance and conversion, for: "The teaching and conduct of Jesus has already previously brought her to repentance and conversion and to an assurance of forgiveness, and this assurance inspired her with love and gratitude."<sup>2</sup>

Acts 10:43. Peter, when first sent by God with the gospel to the Gentiles, proclaimed to Cornelius and those in

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenhuy, Luke, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

his house, "Of Him (Jesus Christ) all the prophets bear witness that through His name every one who believes (πιστεύοντα) in Him has received forgiveness (ἄφεσιν) of sins" (Acts 10:43). The forgiveness, Peter states, is received by everyone who believes in Him. "For the individual work of Jesus Christ or his name has won forgiveness of sins. . . . To receive the gift the individual had to surrender himself unto or rather into, Jesus Christ by an act of faith."<sup>1</sup>

Acts 13:38, 39. Later in the early history of the church, Paul raises his voice with a similar message at Antioch on his first missionary journey. "Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness (ἄφεσις) of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes (πιστεύω) is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39). The forgiveness Paul offered to his audience at the close of his sermon was through Jesus Christ. Through Him, everyone who believes is justified (δικαιωθῆναι) from all things the law could never justify one from. The necessity of this forgiveness and justification is faith in Him.

Acts 26:18. Paul, when standing before King Agrippa, recounts the commission the ascended Christ gave to him at

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<sup>1</sup>Richard B. Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1901), p. 158.

his conversion. "To open their (Jews and Gentiles) eyes so that they may turn from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness (ἀφεσιν) of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith (πίστει) in Me" (Acts 26:18).

The task of Paul was to preach to the Jews and Gentiles that they could receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance with those set apart to God by faith. Obviously, this is only attainable for them by faith.

James 5:15. The letter of James, the elder of the Jerusalem church, provides another passage which connects faith with forgiveness. "And the prayer of faith (πίστεως) will save the one who is sick and will raise him up and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven (ἀφεθήσεται) him" (Jas 5:15).

This verse carries difficulties of interpretation which need to be resolved. The author's purpose is not to resolve these difficulties, but to point out that the prayer of confidence in God by an afflicted person and the elders of his assembly will lead to the forgiveness of the afflicted's sins, if he has committed any. Faith is essentially involved in the forgiveness spoken of here.

The above passages clearly point out the principle that faith is undeniably linked with forgiveness. This point is disputed by few as being the teaching of the Bible. However, as one studies the Bible, he finds no passages

other than these six where the terms for forgiveness and the word for faith are united. The reason for this is that the New Testament writers began to utilize the terms justification, righteousness, salvation and eternal life as the believer's possession through faith in Christ. These concepts carry implicitly the idea of forgiveness. In addition,

It should not be overlooked that faith is a gift bestowed by God (Eph. 2:8), that faith is impossible apart from His prior work (John 6:29). Nevertheless, faith is the response of man to God's convicting work in his life. Thus Acts 16:14 records that "the Lord opened her (Lydia's) heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

A great deal of space has been given in this chapter to establish in the mind of the reader the variability of meanings and usages for the Greek terms employed in the New Testament to express the idea of forgiveness. One should note primarily that the term ἀφίημι has a broad variety of meanings.

Also in this chapter, the conditions of repentance and faith have been explored in all the New Testament passages that link them with forgiveness. It should be noted here that although the meeting of these conditions are a result of the work of God in a person's life (repentance--Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25 and faith--John 6:29; Eph 2:8)

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<sup>1</sup>Busenitz, "Divine Forgiveness," pp. 101-2.

they are still conditions of the heart which must be present for divine forgiveness.

This material is important because it provides the necessary background for the interpretation of Luke 23:24a, addressed in chapter three, and for the discussion of theological implications which arise from the interpretation, considered in chapter four.

## CHAPTER III

### INTERPRETATION OF LUKE 23:34a

#### Introduction

The discussion now arrives at one of the major tasks of the thesis, the interpretation of Luke 23:34a. In order to interpret the passage one must make a decision concerning for whom Jesus prayed when He said "forgive them."

#### Objects of the Prayer

The proposed solutions to the question "For whom was Jesus praying?" are: (1) all the people; (2) the Jews exclusively; (3) the Roman soldiers exclusively; (4) the Jews and Roman soldiers, and (5) the Jews and Roman soldiers exclusive of the leaders. The procedure for dealing with the proposed solutions has been to state the rationale of the view as held by those who propound it, along with identifying adherents to the positions. Following this the faultiness or validity of the proposed solution has been considered.

#### All People

##### Rationale of this view

The proponents of this view generally hold that the prayer was offered specifically for those who were

physically involved in Christ's crucifixion. They nevertheless also provide an extended interpretation which recognizes the prayer as referring to all mankind. This amounts to what may be termed a devotional hermeneutic. Note the way in which the interpretation has been set forth.

ἄφες αὐτοῖς--who are here intended? Doubtless first and directly, the four soldiers, whose work it had been to crucify Him. . . . But not only to them, but to them as the representatives of that, sin of the world, does this prayer apply. The nominative to ποιοῦσιν is οἱ ἄνθρωποι--mankind,--the Jewish nation, . . . but all of us, inasmuch as for our sins He was bruised.<sup>1</sup>

It is undoubtedly a question whom the Lord meant by ἄφες αὐτοῖς, . . . Without doubt He comprehends here both the executioners and the authors of His death, the heathen, with their procurator, the Jews, with their High-Priest, in one prayer together. . . . Inasmuch as our Lord, in the Jews who caused His death, beheld merely the representatives of the whole sinful mankind, we may say that He with these words, by implication, commended this race of men itself, which was the author of His Passion in the cross, to the Father's compassion.<sup>2</sup>

Charles H. Spurgeon is quoted as writing:

I say not that that prayer was confined to His immediate executioners. I believe that it was a far-reaching prayer, which included scribes and Pharisees, Pilate and Herod, Jews and Gentiles--yea, the whole human race in a certain sense, since we were all concerned in that murder. . . .<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Alford, The Four Gospels--The Greek New Testament, vol. 1, ed. E. F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 659.

<sup>2</sup>John P. Lange, Luke in Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 372.

<sup>3</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, Christ's Words From the Cross (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), pp. 16, 17.



Other writers who set forth various forms of the interpretation include, C. J. Ellicott,<sup>1</sup> E. F. Harrison,<sup>2</sup> J. O. Sanders,<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Stier,<sup>4</sup> and Matthew Henry.<sup>5</sup> Ray Summers<sup>6</sup> states that this is a possible interpretation.

#### Refutation of this view

The major problem with this extended interpretation is that it draws the prayer out of the limitations of its historical setting in order to provide an interpretation. Beyond a doubt, it is true that Christ went to the cross for more sinners than those who were physically alive at the time of His crucifixion. However, to affirm that Jesus bore all men in mind on the cross, because He died for more than those who were alive or present, is too speculative for inclusion in sound exegesis. This approach injects into the mind of Christ thoughts which interpreters have no solid

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<sup>1</sup>Charles J. Ellicott, Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 356.

<sup>2</sup>Everett F. Harrison, A Short Life of Christ (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), p. 221.

<sup>3</sup>J. Oswald Sanders, The Incomparable Christ (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 169.

<sup>4</sup>Rudolf Stier, The Words of the Lord Jesus, trans. William B. Pope (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875), pp. 431-32.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, vol. 5 (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), p. 817.

<sup>6</sup>Ray Summers, Commentary on Luke (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1972), p. 304.

evidence were present. This line of reasoning is not good application let alone interpretation of a passage.

### The Jews Exclusively

#### Rationale of this view

As noted in chapter one of this thesis, the view that Jesus was praying for the Jews provided the rationale for scribal deletion of Luke 23:34a from some manuscripts. One writer has asserted as fact the idea "that the words were always taken in antiquity as applying to the Jewish murderers of Jesus not specially to the Roman soldiers."<sup>1</sup> It is indeed true that the early church considered the Jews the murderers of Christ and this murder of Christ as the reason for the destruction of Jerusalem. Note Origen's words in this regard.

We will point out to him (Celsus), and to all who are willing to learn that the city in which the people of the Jews thought Jesus worthy of being crucified, when they said "Crucify him, Crucify him" (Luke 23:21) . . . this city was attacked not long afterwards and was besieged so fiercely for a long time that it was utterly ruined and deserted, since God judged the people who inhabited that place to be unworthy to share human life. . . . This happened on account of the blood of Jesus which because of their plot was poured out upon their land, so that it was no longer able to tolerate<sup>2</sup> people who dared commit such a great crime against him.

The argument in this section seems to be that if Jesus was praying for His executioners, then He was praying

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<sup>1</sup>J. A. Findlay, The Abingdon Bible Commentary (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1929), p. 1057.

<sup>2</sup>Origen, Origen: Contra Celsum, trans. with an introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 482.

for the Jews. N. Geldenhuys appears to concur with this opinion when he writes,

That Jesus did not pray for the Roman soldiers but for the guilty Jewish people follows from the fact that such a prayer for the soldiers was unnecessary, for they carried out orders and had no share in His condemnation. From the context (verse 33) it appears that Jesus' prayer refers to His crucifixion through the agency of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

Plummer agrees that the Jews must be the subject of the prayer, for the Roman soldiers were not the guilty party.

ἀφ' ὧν αὐτοῖς. This cannot refer to the Roman soldiers, who were doing no more than their duty in executing a sentence which has been pronounced by competent authority. It was the Jews, and especially the Jewish hierarchy, who were responsible for what was being done: and but for the pressure which they had put upon him, even Pilate would have remained guiltless in this matter.<sup>2</sup>

Godet,<sup>3</sup> Meyers,<sup>4</sup> Bliss,<sup>5</sup> and Stock<sup>6</sup> all write approving and accepting this view. The rationale for this

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<sup>1</sup> Geldenhuys, Luke, p. 614.

<sup>2</sup> Plummer, Luke, ICC, p. 531.

<sup>3</sup> F. Godet, A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, trans. E. W. Shalders and M. D. Cusin (New York: I. K. Funk & Co., 1881), p. 492.

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1884), p. 565.

<sup>5</sup> George R. Bliss, Luke--An American Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881), p. 337.

<sup>6</sup> Eugene Stock, Talks on St. Luke's Gospel (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), p. 160.

view is then: 1) that the Roman soldiers were only carrying out orders and needed not to be forgiven, 2) the early church held this view.

#### Refutation of this view

The view advocated above has the problem of not being able to answer the argument against it that ποιοῦσιν (a present, indicative active, third person, plural verb) must include a reference to the Roman soldiers.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is that in Luke 23:34b ἔβαλον (a third person plural verb) tells us of what the Roman soldiers were allowed to do by Roman law. Godet himself, who as noted above accepts this view, states: "The casting of the lot for the garments of Jesus. . . . By this act the prisoner became the sport of his executioners. The garment of the cruciarrii belonged to them, according to the Roman law."<sup>2</sup> The idea that the third person plural verb in Luke 23:34a and the third person plural verb in Luke 23:34b does not include the same group is impossible to accept in this context.

In response to the argument that the soldiers were innocent of a sin when carrying out their orders to crucify Christ, the author maintains that if one considers the soldiers' act of killing Jesus not to be a sin, the soldiers were nevertheless still sinning in reference to the

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<sup>1</sup>Alford, The Four Gospels, p. 659.

<sup>2</sup>Godet, Luke, p. 492.

manner and frame of mind in which they carried out the command of their superior officers. "And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!'" (Luke 23:36, 37).

The author does agree that the early church held to the idea that the Jews were being prayed for in Luke 23:34a. However, the argument from the Bible cited above speaks louder to the author than does the argument concerning the belief of the early church.

#### Roman Soldiers

##### Rationale of this view

The argument in favor of this position is that the context clearly indicates the inclusion of the Roman soldiers in Christ's prayer. Simon J. Kistemaker writes: "The immediate context makes it plain that the prayer of Jesus was offered for the Roman soldiers who crucified Him and who cast lots for His clothes (see Luke 23:33 and 34b)."<sup>1</sup> C. G. Montefiore, who is uncommitted to this view, nevertheless finds support for it: "The particular place of the insertion would suggest that the Roman soldiers and executioners are meant."<sup>2</sup> A. T. Robertson also maintains

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<sup>1</sup>Kistemaker, "The Seven Words From the Cross," WTJ, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels, p. 625.

that, "Jesus evidently is praying for the Roman soldiers. . . ." <sup>1</sup> A. R. C. Leaney <sup>2</sup> and David Smith <sup>3</sup> also acknowledge only the Roman soldiers as the objects of Christ's prayer. Writers who hold that the Roman soldiers are the primary objects of the prayer, but also extend the passage to include all people are C. J. Ellicott <sup>4</sup> and H. Alford. <sup>5</sup>

#### Refutation of this view

The author has recognized no problem in accepting from contextual considerations the inclusion of the Roman soldiers in Jesus' first prayer from the cross. However, one should not conclude that from this contextual argument alone that the Jews were excluded from the prayer. Other passages of scripture, which have a direct comment on the crucifixion incident, indicate that the Jews were also considered a guilty party in the event. Note for example the words of Peter's second sermon to the "Men of Israel" (Acts 3:12).

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has gloried His Servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you

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<sup>1</sup> A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 2 (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> A. R. C. Leaney, The Gospel According to Luke: HNTC (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, The Days of His Flesh, p. 496.

<sup>4</sup> Ellicott, Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, p. 356.

<sup>5</sup> Alford, The Four Gospels, p. 659.

disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. . . . And now, brethren, I know you act in ignorance, just as your rulers did also (Acts 3:13-15, 17).

Peter states here that the Jewish people and their rulers were guilty of putting to death, Jesus Christ. In addition they did this in ignorance. As Jesus Christ hung on the cross He prayed for His executioners: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34a). Christ's executioners in light of the Luke 23:32-38 include the Roman soldiers. In the light of Acts 3:12-17 Christ's executioners also include the Jewish people and their leaders, "for they knew not what they did" or, as Peter said, they acted in ignorance.

James Stalker expressed a similar view in his book The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ.

Apparently it was primarily to the soldiers who did the actual work of crucifixion that Jesus referred; because it was in the very midst of their work that the words were uttered, as may be seen in the narrative of St. Luke. . . . But St. Peter, in the beginning of Acts, expressly extends the plea of ignorance so far as to cover even the Sanhedrists.<sup>1</sup>

Another passage of scripture which has a direct bearing on the people involved in the crucifixion event is in 1 Corinthians 2:8. Paul, writing his letter to the church in Corinth, states, "The wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had

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<sup>1</sup>James Stalker, The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1894), p. 194.

understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." "In this specific verse . . . it is apparent that the 'princes' [in KJV, 'rulers' in NASB] refers particularly to the rulers who were ignorantly involved in the death of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

R. C. H. Lenski comments on who "rulers" refers to in this passage. "The Jewish and Roman political leaders are here referred to, but in Christ's time the former were also the ecclesiastical rulers."<sup>2</sup> Donald Guthrie remarks about this passage: "[in] . . . Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:8, the political officials (Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas) are primarily in mind."<sup>3</sup>

The scriptures teach that the Roman soldiers, the political leaders and the Jewish people all acted in the crucifixion event in ignorance. Those who hold that the Roman soldiers are exclusively the objects of Christ's first prayer on the cross, hold an incomplete view of the Lord's intercession at this point.

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<sup>1</sup>Epperley, The First "Word" of Christ From the Cross, pp. 42, 43.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), p. 143.



## Jews and Roman Soldiers

### Rationale of this view

The view delineated now has the distinction of being the most widely accepted and advocated position. The author finds this view to be the most consistent view with both the context and the whole of scripture, as pointed out in the refutation of the immediately preceding position.

The position has been stated by different writers as follows:

Just who are those for whom the Savior is praying? . . . [Those] who proceed along exegetical rather than dogmatic ways, say to themselves that the obvious and the simple sense of the words is that Christ is praying for that group of people there, for the group as it is and as it led Him to His death. . . . The sense of the statement is not that Jesus was praying only for the soldiers. . . . For His words refer to the entire group of those who are responsible for this sinister business. The Savior meant the Jews as well as the Romans. The Romans carrying out the sentence, but the high priests are in command.<sup>1</sup>

Interceding for those who had a part in placing him there (on the cross)--the soldiers for inflicting torture without compunction, Pilate for giving him over to death to save his own position, the Sanhedrin for their determination to destroy him, the nation for not receiving him. . . .<sup>2</sup>

A prayer and an apology for his [Jesus'] executioners. The Roman soldiers who were the immediate instruments of his death, had indeed but little knowledge of him, and the Jews, who were the authors of it, through their obstinate prejudices, apprehended not who he was: for

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<sup>1</sup>Schilder, Christ Crucified, pp. 132, 133.

<sup>2</sup>Harrison, A Short Life of Christ, p. 221.

if they had known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory, 1 Cor. ii.8.<sup>1</sup>

Alfred Edersheim feels it is "presumptuous to seek to determine how far that prayer extended." Nevertheless he writes, "Generally I agree with Nebe--to all (Gentiles and Jews) who, in their participation in the sufferings inflicted on Jesus, acted in ignorance."<sup>2</sup>

Other writers who have expressed this view include: Pierre Benoit,<sup>3</sup> Canon Farrar,<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen,<sup>5</sup> Cunningham Geikie,<sup>6</sup> Robert P. Lightner,<sup>7</sup> Alexander Maclaren,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Benson, The New Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ with Critical Explanatory and Practical Notes, vol. I, trans. and ed. Philip Schaff (New York: T. Carlton & J. Porter, n.d.), p. 499.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 593.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Benoit, The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, trans. Benet Weatherhead (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Canon Farrar, The Gospel According to St. Luke: The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (London: Deighton, Bell and Company, 1880), p. 348.

<sup>5</sup> William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to St. Luke, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 1028.

<sup>6</sup> Cunningham Geike, The Life and Words of Christ, vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), p. 563.

<sup>7</sup> Robert P. Lightner, The Death Christ Died (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1967), pp. 75, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Maclaren, The Gospel According to St. Luke (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), p. 303.

I. Howard Marshall,<sup>1</sup> C. Leon Morris,<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Papini,<sup>3</sup> Fernand Prat,<sup>4</sup> J. W. Shepard,<sup>5</sup> James Stalker,<sup>6</sup> and Lehman Strauss.<sup>7</sup> One should also note the Diatessaron of Tatian which gives evidence that Tatian held this view.<sup>8</sup>

#### Validity of this view

The author finds this view to be the most consistent of the interpretations. Consistent with both the immediate context and the whole of scripture. The arguments from context and from Acts 3:17 and 1 Corinthians 2:8 have been expressed in the immediately preceding section, "Roman soldiers-Refutation of this view." The reader is referred to that section for the details of this position.

<sup>1</sup>Marshall, Luke, p. 867.

<sup>2</sup>C. J. Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke, vol. 3: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 327.

<sup>3</sup>Giovanni Papini, Life of Christ, trans. Dorothy Canfield Fisher (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1923), p. 358.

<sup>4</sup>Fernand Prat, Jesus Christ: His Life, His Teaching and His Work, vol. 2, trans. John H. Heenan (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., n.d.), pp. 384, 385.

<sup>5</sup>J. W. Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels--An Exegetical Study, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), p. 597.

<sup>6</sup>Stalker, Trial and Death of Jesus, p. 194.

<sup>7</sup>Lehman Strauss, The Day God Died (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup>Tatian, The Earliest Life of Christ--The Diatessaron of Tatian, trans. and annotated by J. Hanlyn Hill (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), p. 209.

## Exclusive of the Leaders

### Rationale of this view

A few prominent writers in the history of the Church have presented the view that the Lord prayed on the cross for people involved in His crucifixion, excluding certain leaders. For example J. C. Ryle has stated:

Who were those for whom our Lord prayed?--I cannot as some confine His prayer to the Roman soldiers who nailed Him to the cross. I rather regard it as applying also to the great bulk of Jewish people who were standing by, and aiding and abetting His crucifixion. They were mere tools in the hands of the leading Scribes and Pharisees. . . . Whether our Lord included the Chief Priests and Scribes, Annas and Caiaphas and their companions, who had heard His declarations that He was the Christ, and yet formally rejected and condemned Him, I think more than doubtful.<sup>1</sup>

John Calvin's reasoning also follows this line.

It is probable, however, that Christ did not pray for all indiscriminately, but only for the wretched multitude, who were carried away by inconsiderate zeal, and not by premeditated wickedness. For since the scribes and priests were persons in regard to whom no ground was left for hope, it would have been in vain for him to pray for them.<sup>2</sup>

Dennis Clark also appears to hold this view in his book, Jesus Christ--His Life and Teaching.<sup>3</sup>

C. J. Ellicott and A. T. Robertson present a slightly different twist to this position by stating that the prayer

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Ryle, St. Luke in Expository Thoughts on the Gospel, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1875), pp. 467, 468.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke, vol. 3, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 301.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Clark, Jesus Christ His Life and Teaching (Elgin, IL: Dove Publishers, 1977), p. 279.

was for the Roman soldiers exclusive of the leaders who were ultimately responsible for Christ's murder.

Who were the primary objects of the prayer? Not Pilate, for he knew that he had condemned the innocent; not the chief priests and scribes, for their sin too, was against light and knowledge. Those for whom our Lord prayed were clearly the soldiers who nailed Him to the cross.<sup>1</sup>

"Jesus evidently is praying for the Roman soldiers, who were only obeying, but not for the Sanhedrin."<sup>2</sup>

Henry Alford goes so far as to identify only Caiaphas as excluded from the prayer.

οὐ γὰρ οἶδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν primarily . . . spoken of the soldiers,--then of the council, who delivered Him up. . . . But certainly from this intercession is excluded that one sin--strikingly brought out by the passage thus cited as committed by him who said it, viz. Caiaphas, and hinted at again by our Lord, John xix.11\_\_.<sup>3</sup>

#### Refutation of this view

The proponents of these exclusive of leaders views, are treading on shakey ground, in light of Acts 3:17 and 1 Corinthians 2:8. Clearly these two passages can leave no other conclusion than that the prayer of the Lord includes all those involved in and responsible for His death on the cross, as ignorant actors in the event. To exclude any from the prayer on the basis of one's own opinion of the weight of their offense, due to the amount of light they

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<sup>1</sup>Ellicott, Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, p. 356.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, p. 285.

<sup>3</sup>Alford, The Four Gospels, p. 659.

may have confronted and rejected, is to cut across the grain of scripture.

### Conclusion

The objects of Christ's first prayer from the cross were all those surrounding the incident who were involved or responsible for the murder. All other views ignore some or all of the contributions which the Bible makes to one's understanding of the intent of the Savior as He hung on the cross.

### Contextual Meaning of ἄφεσις

A second decision which must be reached to interpret Luke 23:34a is the meaning of the word ἄφεσις in its context. The two applicable proposals from the preceding discussion of ἀφίημι in chapter two are cancel, remit, pardon and leave.

#### Pardon Proposal

BAGD states that the pardon usage of ἀφίημι is "with dative of persons only."<sup>1</sup> The lexical researchers then proceed to sight Luke 23:34 as a usage of ἀφίημι in the pardon or remit sense. One should note that a verb form of ἀφίημι (ἄφεσις) does appear here with a dative of persons as the objects of the verb, αὐτοῖς. Before readily accepting this as the only possibility however, consideration should be given to another usage of ἀφίημι.

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 126.

## Leave Proposal

The usage of ἀφίημι expressing the idea of leave is identified by BAGD as appearing "with persons as objects in its literal, rather than figurative employment."<sup>1</sup> One illustration of this usage pointed out in the lexicon is Matthew 5:40, "And the one who would go to law with you and take away your shirt yield or leave--ἀφες αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον--to him also [your] coat."

Note in this usage (Matt 5:40) that the dative singular of αὐτός (αὐτῷ) is used with ἀφες. In Luke 23:34a the dative plural of αὐτός (αὐτοῖς) is used with ἀφες. Does it not seem possible then that Jesus could be praying in this manner? "Father, yield to them (or leave them or permit them), for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus, if understood as praying in this sense is still viewed as fulfilling Isaiah 53:12; making intercession for the transgressors: He also seems to be praying more in accord with the actions which are being performed against and around Him by people. The actions of crucifixion (Luke 23:33), dividing of His garments (Luke 23:34b), the gaping of the crowd (Luke 23:35a), the sneering of the rulers (Luke 23:35b), the mocking of the soldiers (Luke 23:36-37), and the inscription posted over His head (Luke 23:38).

The imperfect tense of the λέγω (ἔλεγεν), used in Luke 23:34a, may indicate that Christ began at this point to

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 126.

pray to the Father, a process which continued during the events of the crucifixion. This would reinforce the idea that as every action was leveled against Him, He was praying, "Father, permit them."

The author is well aware of the fact that this view of the contextual meaning of ἄφεσις is not in keeping with any major translation. Nevertheless, the context, which must determine the meaning of any term with such a wide variability of possibilities as ἀφίημι, does seem to better indicate the idea of leave, rather than pardon, for the Greek term ἄφεσις.

### Conclusion

The context of the usage of ἄφεσις under discussion indicates more readily the idea of "to leave," rather than "to pardon or remit" as the proper translation. In addition, this translation of ἄφεσις in Luke 23:34a is perfectly acceptable both grammatically and lexically. The proper translation of ἄφεσις in Luke 23:34a is therefore "leave, yield to or permit."

### The Interpretation of Luke 23:34a

#### ἄφεσις as Pardon

Most Bible commentators and theological writers who have published materials attempting to interpret this verse view ἄφεσις as referring to "pardon" or "forgive." Note for example these statements. "His prayer . . . speaks of



forgiveness as its great object."<sup>1</sup> "'Forgive them' means exactly that. It means 'Blot out their transgression completely. . . .'"<sup>2</sup>

The writings of such authors either implicitly indicate or explicitly state that the prayer for forgiveness presupposes repentance and faith for the salvation of the objects prayed for.

Finally, we must not overlook what is intimated by this ignorance admitted in the first word from the cross--that on that account a salutary knowledge, and confession of repentance, still remains possible; that this is doubtless presupposed as the condition of forgiveness; yea, for many here referred to, is in a certain sense foredeclared and prophesied. Otherwise, this intercession of grace would supplicate forgiveness generally and unconditionally, in direct contradiction to the whole of Scripture, which everywhere demands the strictest repentance of every, the least, sin, in order to its being forgiven. See simply Lu. xxiv 47. Out of repentance alone rises faith; but repentance and faith are everywhere inseparable and indispensable, where forgiveness is to be enjoyed.<sup>3</sup>

"'Blot out their transgression completely. In thy sovereign grace cause them to repent truly, so that they can be and will be pardoned fully.'"<sup>4</sup>

This shows us the fulfillment of this prayer which Jesus had in mind. By no means a pardon without repentance--that would run counter to all Scripture and to the very

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<sup>1</sup> Stier, The Words of the Lord Jesus Christ, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> Hendriksen, Luke, p. 1028.

<sup>3</sup> Stier, The Words of the Lord Jesus Christ, p. 436.

<sup>4</sup> Hendriksen, Luke, p. 1028.

redemption Jesus was now effecting. But a pardon through repentance when the truth would be brought home to them. . . .<sup>1</sup>

For not only does he abstain from revenge, but pleads with God the Father for the salvation of those by whom He is most cruelly tormented. . . . Nor can it be doubted that this prayer was heard by the heavenly Father, and that this was the cause why many of the people afterward drank by faith the blood which they had shed.<sup>2</sup>

"The end of the Gospel gives this ἀφεσις its mighty ring; it ends with forgiveness and the invitation to repent and the promise of the coming kingdom."<sup>3</sup>

The adherents of this understanding of ἀφεσις usually recognize the answer or part of the answer to this prayer in the fact that God did not bring an immediate judgment on the people involved in the crucifixion but gave them space to repent. In addition, many view the conversions over the space of the next forty year period before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as involved in God's answer to Jesus' request.

Give them space, and give them motive to repent! . . . The calling to mind this word concerning a forgiveness, even then prepared, was helpful to the repentance of many even then; and certainly of many under subsequent apostolical preaching.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), pp. 1134-35.

<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists; Matthew, Mark and Luke, vol. 3, trans. and comp. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 300-01.

<sup>3</sup>Schlatter as cited by Geldenhuys, Luke, p. 614.

<sup>4</sup>Stier, The Words of the Lord Jesus Christ, p. 436.

Part of the answer may well be the fact that Jerusalem's fall did not occur immediately. For a period of about forty years the gospel of salvation full and free was still being proclaimed to the Jews. Not only that but also: many were actually led to the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

The prayer of Jesus was granted in the forty years respite during which they were permitted, before perishing, to hear the apostolic preaching. The wrath of God might have been discharged upon them at the very moment.<sup>2</sup>

The reader is further referred to R. C. H. Lenski,<sup>3</sup> Norval Geldenhuys,<sup>4</sup> James Stalker<sup>5</sup> and John Gill.<sup>6</sup>

### Weakness

The weakness of this position is that everyone involved in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; including Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas, the soldiers and the Jewish crowd, must be viewed as having been converted in the space God allowed for repentance. The reason this logical deduction must follow from the "pardon" position is that all of the people mentioned above were objects of Christ's prayer, as was seen in the section of this chapter entitled, "Objects of the prayer."

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<sup>1</sup>Hendriksen, Luke, p. 1028.

<sup>2</sup>Godet, Luke, p. 492.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, Luke, p. 1135.

<sup>4</sup>Geldenhuys, Luke, p. 614.

<sup>5</sup>Stalker, The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ, pp. 195, 196.

<sup>6</sup>John Gill, An Exposition of the New Testament, vol. 1 (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1852), p. 579.

If one does not accept this point as being a valid point of weakness then the option is to view the request of Jesus as being unanswered or given a no answer by the Father. This negative answer then raises serious Christological problems, in the light of the fact that Christ requested (ἀφες--imperative) the Father to forgive all when it was outside the Father's will.

The idea that Jesus could make a request not in submission to the Father's will is an impossibility, Christologically speaking. For note the words of Christ concerning His actions. "I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 9:28b, 29). If Jesus was always pleasing the Father, then, according to the apostle John, He must receive the request He expressed. "Whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

The reader may perhaps be wondering about Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42, Matt 26:39, Mark 14:36), where He appears to express His will not in conformity to the Father's will. Was Christ praying outside the will of the Father in this incident?

In answer to this question one should first note that Jesus Christ had an unfallen human nature, which had a will to avoid pain. Jesus expresses His humanity in this

incident. However, one must also observe that Jesus ends the expression of His request not to take the cup of death on the cross with an acknowledgment of the Father's will and His desire for that will to transpire. This incident is more of a message about Christ's submission to the Father than a prayer contrary to the Father's will.

The point that Jesus' prayer was not outside the Father's will is also testified to by the fact that the first prayer from the cross is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12, "and [He] interceded for the transgressors." Does it not seem incredible to believe that the Lord could prophesy through Isaiah an event in His crucifixion which was outside the will of God the Father? Yet this is what must be believed if one holds to the position that Jesus prayed for the forgiveness, in the sense of a full salvation, of those involved in the crucifixion event.

John Calvin attempts to escape the pressure of arguments similar to those expressed here by stating:

Thus when Christ saw that both the Jewish people and the soldiers raged against Him with blind fury, though their ignorance was not excusable, He had pity on them, and presented Himself as their intercessor. Yet knowing that God would be an avenger, He left to Him the exercise of judgment against the desperate.<sup>1</sup>

The problem with Calvin's explanation is that he sees Jesus as praying for the salvation of these people, while Jesus knows the desperate among them will still suffer the wrath of God's judgment. That makes Jesus' prayer

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<sup>1</sup>Calvin, Matthew, Mark, Luke, p. 300.

apply only to the elect. The interpretation of Calvin at this point seems to follow doctrinal reasoning rather than exegetical investigation and should therefore be rejected.<sup>1</sup>

#### ἀφες as Leave

The interpretation of ἀφες as "leave" finds no support among Bible versions or in major commentaries. In and of itself, however, this does not remove the possibility of the appropriateness of translating the verb in this manner.

As has been cited previously in this chapter, ἀφες grammatically and lexically could be understood as "leave" or "permit." In addition, this understanding of ἀφες proves to be more contextual than the pardon concept.

Note, for example, that Jesus bases His prayer on the fact that the people involved in His crucifixion do not know what they were doing. If Jesus is praying to the Father to leave or allow these people to continue in their actions, this prayer is then consistent with the Gethsemane prayer where Christ states His submission to the Father's will.

This view also aligns with the Biblical doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ. For the view recognizes Jesus as praying for the Father's tolerance of these people which is consistent with the Father's will (2 Pet 3:9) rather than contrary to it.

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<sup>1</sup> John Gill also advocates that Christ prayed for the elect in Luke 23:34a on page 579 of An Exposition of the New Testament.

Although no writers have expressed the idea that ἄφεσις means "leave" in Luke 23:34a, a great number of writers do attach the idea of tolerance to their understanding of ἄφεσις as forgiveness.

Charles C. Ryrie, for example, has written concerning this verse, "This was probably uttered as they nailed Him to the cross and is a plea for God to be longsuffering."<sup>1</sup> Other writers have made the following statements.

This detention is not a plea for the justification of the sinner, and is not a plea against justification, it simply desires that God will temporarily withhold the terrible punishment, the catastrophic annihilation which must necessarily follow the condemnation and cursing of the Prince of Life by this generation of vipers. . . . May it please God, "not to make any work of it," today, not to make any work of what is being done by human hands, by Adam and his generation.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus, in pleading their cause before His Father, does not ask for their pardon absolutely and unconditionally. He implores for them the grace to repent and a time delay for their repentance. And his prayer is not in vain. God will wait forty years before making his hand heavy upon this unbelieving people.<sup>3</sup>

"Are we to suppose that the prayer for forgiveness was a virtual setting aside of divine justice? No, it simply meant that when these who had joined in putting Jesus to death had the chance to hear the gospel preached to them. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

"The meaning is not forgive them without repentance, but give

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Schilder, Christ Crucified, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>Prat, Jesus Christ, p. 385.

<sup>4</sup>Harrison, A Short Life of Christ, p. 221.



them space for it. And Christ's prayer prevails for this."<sup>1</sup>  
 "While on the cross Jesus cried, 'Father, forgive [ἀφες] them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34), in an apparent request to the Father not to immediately destroy them."<sup>2</sup>

All of the above writers plus many others such as W. Hendriksen,<sup>3</sup> N. Geldenhuys,<sup>4</sup> R. C. H. Lenski,<sup>5</sup> J. O. Sanders,<sup>6</sup> Arthur Pink,<sup>7</sup> James Stalker<sup>8</sup> and F. Godet<sup>9</sup> view Jesus' prayer as a request to the Father to give time. The idea is to leave or to allow Jesus' executioners to perform their actions and then give them time to learn what they did and repent. These writers in essence see in the term ἀφες the tolerance concept advocated by the author, but they continue to maintain that ἀφες carries the idea of "pardon." If "pardon" is the idea of ἀφες here, then where do these

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Adam, An Exposition of the Four Gospels, vol. 2, ed. A. Westoly (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1837), p. 349.

<sup>2</sup>Busenitz, "Divine Forgiveness," p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Hendriksen, Luke, p. 1028.

<sup>4</sup>Geldenhuys, Luke, p. 608.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, Luke, p. 1135.

<sup>6</sup>Sanders, The Incomparable Christ, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur W. Pink, The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup>Stalker, The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ, p. 195.

<sup>9</sup>Godet, Luke, p. 492.



authors find Jesus requesting tolerance? In essence, these authors do see the tolerance concept in ἄφεσις but choose to stay with the traditional translation of the verb. This writer's point is that the translation of ἄφεσις as "leave" or "permit" is really more in accord with the position the authors cited above advocate as witnessed by their own remarks.

### Weakness

Two weaknesses are evident in the interpretation of ἄφεσις as "leave." The first is, as mentioned above, the view is not the way in which the verb has been rendered historically by translators or commentators, who nevertheless, do see the idea of tolerance involved.

The second problem is more acute. Why, if Stephen's final prayer while being martyred is patterned after Christ's prayer, does he call upon the Lord, "Lord, do not hold against (στήσης) them this sin" (Acts 7:60)?

The answer must lie in the idea that this is the way in which Stephen understood the Lord's first prayer on the cross. This is a difficult problem. However, the author's view is not the only interpretation which faces a problem at this point. The other major view, that presupposed repentance and faith for a full salvation, also must answer this problem to illustrate the validity of their interpretation.

In light of the fact that Stephen was in a special way being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:55) at the

time he prayed this prayer, the author concludes that another thesis would be required to provide an interpretation of this prayer in harmony with the context and the whole of scripture. Suffice it to say here that the weight of Stephen's prayer, a fallen sinner redeemed by grace through faith, is not as heavy as that of the weight of the Lord's prayer, who only spoke that which the Father taught Him (John 8:28), and did only that which He saw the Father doing (John 5:19).

### Conclusion

The grammatical, lexical and contextual evidence points out that ἀφες as used in Luke 23:34a can correctly be understood as "to leave," "to permit" or "to yield." The historical evidence of no apparent, immediate judgment upon those involved in the crucifixion of Christ and the forty year period before the destruction of Jerusalem for rejecting the Messiah (cf. Luke 13:34, 35; 19:41-44; Matt 24:1, 2), points out that historically the prayer should be interpreted as a request for God "to leave" or "tolerate" these people and their actions, giving space for a full salvation.

The idea that Jesus' request was for God to be tolerant, was demonstrated to be the understanding of many commentators and theological writers. These writers hold this view, even though they do not translate ἀφες as "leave."

The understanding of ἀφες as pardon was shown to be faulty on the grounds that it does not fit as well with the context as does the tolerance view. Also, this view was

seen to have Jesus praying not in submission to the Father's will, a Christological impossibility. The author concludes therefore that ἀφεῖς is best understood as "leave."

A number of theological implications arise with this interpretation. These implications are the focus of chapter four.

CHAPTER IV  
THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND  
FINAL CONCLUSION

Theological Implications

Introduction

A number of theological implications arise concerning the interpretation set forth by the author. Two theological implications are stated and answered in this chapter.

Ignorance as a Basis of Forgiveness

Popular views

Commentators appear to agree on the meaning of the phrase, "they do not know what they are doing." This phrase refers to the fact that those for whom Jesus was praying did not know whom they were putting to death.

This phrase is generally recognized by writers as the basis of Jesus' request. "Jesus in his earnest intercession for his torturers, even presents to the Father a special plea, an argument, as it were, for the granting of his petition, namely, for they do not know what they are doing."<sup>1</sup> "The expiring Saviour backed up His prayer for the forgiveness of His enemies with the argument--'For they know

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<sup>1</sup>Hendriksen, Luke, p. 1028.

not what they do.'"<sup>1</sup> Gill<sup>2</sup> and Ryle,<sup>3</sup> on the other hand, see the phrase not as a plea for pardon but as a description of the state of those responsible for the death of Jesus.

The question which arises is whether ignorance can be viewed as a basis for forgiveness. The majority of commentators get around the issue by viewing the forgiveness request as presupposing repentance and faith for a full salvation. The problem with this has already been discussed when dealing with Jesus' praying in submission to the Father's will.

Gill and Ryle's position, that the statement is a description and not a plea, does not solve the problem. For forgiveness is still requested for people in a state of ignorance.

#### Author's view

If one holds ἀφεσις to be "leave" rather than "forgive," the problem of ignorance as a basis for forgiveness disappears. For Jesus is understood to be interceding for God's tolerance of these people and their actions: a tolerance which God expressed for forty years to the Jewish

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<sup>1</sup>Stalker, The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup>Gill, An Exposition of the New Testament, p. 579.

<sup>3</sup>Ryle, Luke, p. 467.

nation as a whole. A tolerance of an indeterminate length to the individuals involved in the crucifixion.

Consistency with the Conditions  
for Forgiveness

Popular view

The second theological implication which traditionally is mentioned in association with Luke 23:34a is whether the conditions of forgiveness were met by the people for whom Jesus prayed? One writer has expressed his view in this manner.

The first word from the cross portrays our Lord as a divine Intercessor, crucified on the accursed tree, forgetting Himself and praying for others. Scripture does not say that His crucifiers had repented, nor even that they regretted driving the nails. It does not say that they loved Him nor had a desire to follow Him. Apparently they were untouched either by the injustice of the verdict, the hostility of His enemies or the divine compassion and dignity of the Victim. So far as we know, they were as hard-hearted after they drove the nails as they had been when they placed His cross upon His weakened shoulders and led Him to Calvary. Yet He prayed for them.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that Jesus prayed for these people while they were inpenitent. The generally accepted view is that He prayed for them to repent and trust Him for forgiveness. The issue of Jesus' prayer and its consistency with the Father's will again arise to counter this view.

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick David Niedermeyer, The Seven Words From the Cross (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1932), p. 24.

### Author's view

If ἀφεσις is regarded as "leave," then Jesus' prayer of intercession is considered effectual whether the individuals involved repented and placed faith in Christ or not. For tolerance has been (cf. Gen 6:3) and is now continuing (cf. 2 Pet 3:9) to be expressed by God to inpenitent individuals.

Jesus' prayer under this position is viewed as being completely consistent with the whole of Scripture and God's will. For Isaiah prophesied of the suffering servant of God. "He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isa 53:12).

### Conclusion

Jesus does use the plea of ignorance as a basis for the Father granting His request. In addition, the conditions of repentance and faith are not necessary for Jesus' prayer to be effectual and answered in the affirmative. The reason for this is that Jesus prayed for the Father to let these people carry out their activities. He prayed for the Father's tolerance of them. The fact that some did repent and accept God's full salvation is a result of Jesus' intercession, for God did express toward the executioners of His Son, tolerance.

### Final Conclusion

The text of Luke 23:34a should be regarded as an authentic statement of Christ. The weight of external

evidence and internal evidence points clearly to this conclusion.

The discussion of chapter two establishes in one's mind the various terms available to Jesus to express forgiveness. In addition the variability of the term ἀφίημι provides several possibilities of usage. The conditions for forgiveness were also investigated in this chapter by the means of analyzing all the texts which link repentance with forgiveness and faith with forgiveness. The conclusion was observed that repentance and faith are necessary for forgiveness.

Chapter three provides the interpretation of Luke 23:34a by establishing who the objects of Christ's prayer were, and what is the contextual meaning of ἄφεσις. The popular interpretations of the passage were investigated and their weakness identified.

Two theological implications of the author's interpretation were raised and answered in chapter four. These implications were also identified as causing major problems for the popular interpretation.

Luke 23:34a should be viewed as an authentic intercessory prayer uttered by Jesus Christ from the cross. The purpose of the prayer was to express Christ's desire for the Father to demonstrate tolerance toward those responsible and involved in the Son's crucifixion. The basis for granting



their request was the fact that these people did not know who they were killing.

"Father, permit them, for they do not know what they are doing."

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