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The Divine Christology of 'Remember Me' (Luke 23:42) in Light of Lament

Channing L. Crisler
Associate Professor of New Testament
College of Christian Studies, Anderson University
ccrisler@andersonuniversity.edu

Abstract

Luke's crucifixion scene includes a brief and unique exchange between the crucified Jesus and an unidentified crucified individual often referred to as the 'penitent thief'. The dialogue between the two only spans two verses (Luke 23:42-43). Among the words they exchange, interpreters sometimes neglect the thief's request – 'remember me' (μνήσθητί μου) – and its Christological implications. This article explores those implications given the request's intertextual and intratextual features as well as its reception history. Based on these features, the overarching argument is that the cry 'remember me' functions as a dying lament shaped by similar laments in Israel's Scriptures. The 'remember me' of this 'lamenting thief' is a request for divine forgiveness, mercy, and vindication. Such cries are normally directed to Israel's God alone within the cultural heritage of Second Temple Judaism. In this way, Luke not only includes Jesus within the divine identity of Israel's God, but, in the climactic scene of his biography, he brings him into the deepest contours of that relationship, namely the cry for deliverance in the face of death and judgement.

1. Introduction

The Eastern Orthodox compilation of hagiographies entitled the Synaxarion contains a couplet in honour of Luke's penitent criminal on Good Friday.[1] It reads 'Eden's locked gates the Thief has opened wide, by putting in the key, "Remember me."' The couplet reflects the main contours of the brief dialogue in Luke 23:39-43, including Jesus's promise of paradise in response to one criminal's request – 'Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom'

1. Luke describes the two individuals hung on either side of Jesus as κακοῦργοι ('criminals'; Luke 23:32). Matthew and Mark describe the two individuals as λῃσταί ('robbers/revolutionaries'; Matt 27:38; Mark 15:27). See BDAG 502, 594.

(Luke 23:42). This dialogue has captured the imaginations of interpreters for centuries. Of the twenty-four Greek words exchanged between Jesus and this thief, the adverb σήμερον, along with its soteriological implications, has probably garnered the most attention.[2] It has understandably spurred theological conjecture about issues such as the intermediate state of Christian disciples. However, I am more fascinated by two other words in this exchange: μνήσθητί μου. The criminal's dying request, 'remember me', is at least *a* 'key' to unlocking Luke's divinely relational Christology.

By the phrase 'divinely relational Christology', I am combining two popular views from ongoing studies of early Christology. As is well known, Richard Bauckham argues that early Christians identified Jesus 'directly with the one God of Israel, including Jesus in the unique identity of this one God'.[3] Jesus's sovereign involvement in creation and deliverance places him within the identity of Israel's God. One way to supplement Bauckham's divine Christology is to note that Jesus also shares in YHWH's divine identity by his ability and willingness to answer cries of distress as we find them in Luke. This is a characteristic that likewise defined Second Temple perceptions of Israel's God. Additionally, in his examination of Paul's Christology, Chris Tilling argues that Paul presents the relationship between Jesus and believers in a way that parallels YHWH's relationship with Israel.[4] Tilling's paradigm is applicable to the Christology of Luke where Jesus relates to afflicted parties in the same way that YHWH relates to ancient Israel, namely by answering their cries. In short, the Lukan Jesus is included in the divine identity of YHWH given the fact that he relates to various figures in one of the main ways that YHWH relates to ancient Israel, that is by answering their laments. This ability places him on

2. As Benjamin Wilson notes, 'The bulk of analysis concerning the broader pericope has understandably centered on Jesus's response to the criminal' ('Directly Addressing "Jesus": The Vocative Ἰησοῦ in Luke 23:42,' *JBL* 136 (2017): 435, https://doi.org/10.1353/jbl.2017.0028). Surprisingly, some consequential commentaries on Luke overlook the Christological implications of μνήσθητί μου. See, e.g., Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 377; Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke,* New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 634–635; Michael Wolter, *The Gospel According to Luke: Volume 2 (Luke 9:51-24)*, trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 529.

3. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1.

4. Chris Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1–10.

the 'creator side of the creator–creature divide' with everything that such a placement implies.[5]

With this Christological paradigm in tow, the overarching argument in what follows is that the penitent criminal's request for remembrance resembles a kind of dying lament exclusively directed to YHWH within the cultural heritage of Second Temple Judaism. Consequently, Luke not only includes Jesus within the divine identity of Israel's God, but, in the climactic scene of his biography, he brings him into the deepest contours of that relationship, namely the cry for deliverance in the face of death and judgement. Support for this reading stems from four complementary considerations: (1) fragments of lament that feature pleas for remembrance in Second Temple literature; (2) *intertextual* features of lament that characterise the criminal's request and amplify it; (3) *intratextual* features of lament that prepare Luke's readers for the criminal's climactic request; and (4) early Christian prayers of μνήσθητί μου that are found in both literary and epigraphic sources which confirm that at least some subsequent interpreters of Luke understood the criminal's request and its Christological implications in the way I am suggesting here. Among these considerations, it is worth noting that the intertextual method employed in this essay is an adaptation of the metaleptic approach made famous in New Testament scholarship through the work of Richard B. Hays.[6] In short, while cognisant of the historical pitfalls associated with intertextual reading of ancient texts, and attempting to avoid them, I interpret Luke's use of lament language in relation to its wider Old Testament context and with the understanding that Luke adjusts his use of the language to meet his biographical aim, which is to present Jesus as the righteous lamenter par excellence. I have discussed my intertextual approach and understanding of Luke's biographical aims at length elsewhere; however, due to space constraints, I will not discuss those matters here.[7]

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5. Andrew Ter Ern Loke uses this turn of phrase in his study of divine Christology. See Andrew Ter Ern Loke, *The Origin of Divine Christology*, SNTSMS 167 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 13, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108185486.

6. For an explanation of *metalepsis*, see Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 14–21.

7. See Channing L. Crisler, *Reading Romans as Lament: Paul's Use of Old Testament Lament Language in His Most Famous Letter* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 2–4, 13–15; Channing L. Crisler, *Echoes of Lament and the Christology of Luke*, NTM 39 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2020), 5–14; Channing L. Crisler, *A Synoptic Christology of Lament: The Lord Who Answered and the Lord Who Cried* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2023), 3–11.

2. Defining Jewish Lament and Divine Remembrance

Before beginning the analysis in earnest, it will be helpful to define two phrases that occur frequently in what follows. First, 'lament' refers to a Jewish prayer form that is in full bloom in the Hebrew Bible but only enjoys fragmentary representation in the prayers of Second Temple Judaism and its respective literary corpus. Lament is most clearly marked by a spontaneous cry of distress such as 'How long, O LORD?'[8] However, this prayer form is far more than a cry or loud shriek that occurs at moments of intense pain. As Claus Westermann puts it, 'In the Old Testament from beginning to end, the "call of distress," the "cry out of the depths," that is, the lament, is an inevitable part of what happens between God and man.'[9] This 'inevitable' occurrence often involves a flexible five-part pattern that shapes the contours of the experience: (1) prior promise; (2) suffering; (3) cry of distress; (4) deliverance; and (5) praise.[10] The catalyst for this patterned prayer, whether individual or communal, is the tension between God's *prior promise* of deliverance and *suffering* stemming from a variety of sources such as disease, the prospect of death, foreign and domestic enemies, sin, guilt, and an overarching concern with divine wrath. That tension generates a *cry of distress* such as 'How long, O LORD?' or 'Have mercy on me, O LORD.' The lamenter then experiences *deliverance* from God, although the form of that deliverance varies, which leads to *praise*. This pattern is part of a larger linguistic register of lament replete with its own participants, idiom,

8. See, e.g., Ps 13:2-3.

9. Claus Westermann, 'The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament', *Int* 28 (1974): 22, https://doi.org/10.1177/002096437402800102.

10. Old Testament form critics such as Herman Gunkel and Claus Westermann detected patterns within ancient Israelite prayers of lament. Gunkel, the 'father of the *Gattungsforschung*', primarily focused on unearthing the *Sitz im Leben* behind these patterned prayers. However, he still gave attention to the patterns and participants of lament. See Herman Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Mercer: Mercer University Press 1988), 85–93. Westermann, who was more of the theologian of *Klage*, suggested a five-fold pattern of lament which is embedded in both events and prayers related to Israel's deliverance. While reflecting on Exodus 1–15 and Deuteronomy 26:5-11, he explains 'The events making up the deliverance form a sequence which is always encountered (though it is not always the same) where a deliverance is related: distress, a cry of distress, a hearkening (promise of deliverance), deliverance response of those saved (the praise of God)' (Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 259–260). I have adapted Westermann's pattern by placing 'hearkening', which I refer to as prior promise, at the beginning of the psalm rather than in the middle. After all, there is no lament without reflection on a prior promise.

and theology. In short, lament is prayer language that provides a window into how ancient Israelites perceived YHWH, themselves, and their pain.

Second, divine remembrance in what follows refers to God acting upon a prior promise in response to the request of an afflicted individual or community. Samuel Terrien likens the request 'remember me' before God to a child's request before her parents.[11] Patrick Miller identifies three kinds of prayers for remembrance: (1) a negative request that God not remember something such as one's sins; (2) a positive request that God act according to his ways, character, and covenant; and (3) a request that God consider the petitioner's faithful deeds.[12] Whatever the analogy or classification, God's prior promise functions as the main catalyst for the cry 'remember' and it is the prior promise that shapes the divine response which the lamenter awaits.

Lament language occurs frequently in the Gospel of Luke even if interpreters often neglect its presence and significance.[13] In the broadest sense, one can categorise this language in Luke as laments *to* Jesus and *by* Jesus.[14] Examples of the former begin in Luke's narrative as early as Peter's call narrative in which the miraculous catch of fish prompts a lament-like response: 'Then Simon Peter, having seen, fell at the knees of Jesus saying, "Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord"' (Luke 5:8).[15] Jesus likewise participates in lament, most notably his prayers over Jerusalem and his citation of a lament for vindication from Psalm 30:6 LXX at the crucifixion scene.[16] Among these Lukan laments, the criminal's dying request is the main concern of this article. The interplay between Jewish lament language and various episodes in which figures cry out to Jesus produces the unstated point that the Lukan Jesus shares in the divine identity of YHWH, relating to these figures in a way that only YHWH can, namely by answering their requests for deliverance through a command or promise.

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11. See Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 255.

12. See Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 110–111.

13. For a discussion on the history of interpretation as it relates to lament and the Gospel of Luke, see Crisler, *Echoes of Lament*, 42–47.

14. For extensive analysis of these Lukan laments, see Crisler, *Echoes of Lament*, 130–273.

15. For other laments to Jesus in their wider narrative contexts, see Luke 7:1-10; 7:36-50; 8:22-25,26-39; 17:12-19; 18:35-43. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of ancient texts are by the author.

16. For laments by Jesus in the wider narrative contexts, see Luke 13:31-35; 19:41-44; 22:39-46; 23:44-48.

3. Laments for Divine Remembrance in Second Temple Literature

We turn first to the use of lament language in Second Temple literature. Scholars have sometimes debated whether lament is still extant in the Second Temple era. Much of the debate revolves around the relationship between prayers of lament and prayers of penitence. Westermann famously argued that the latter entirely replaced the former in the Second Temple era.[17] However, more recently, Mark Boda has framed the analysis of prayer language in this era as a 'continuum of prayer' in which penitential prayers tend to dominate but not to the exclusion of lament. Rather than enter the fray of that discussion here, I will work on the basis that I find Boda's suggestion convincing. Consequently, the following analysis presupposes that penitential prayer dominates expressions of prayer in the Second Temple era, but fragments of lament are embedded in these expressions. Moreover, in keeping with the observations of Judith Newman, I will also work on the basis that these fragments of lament contain a substantial amount of what she calls 'scripturalization'.[18] Simply put, prayer language from Israel's Scriptures influences the composition of new prayers in the Second Temple era, including fragments of lament.[19] Scripturalisation also impacts lament language in Luke, as I will discuss shortly. What I offer here is a summary of what characterises requests for divine remembrance in Second Temple literature, with an eye towards their relevance for understanding the criminal's request.

3.1 Remembrance, Sin, and Guilt

Uses of μνήσθητι often involve a link between guilt for sin and the threat of death. For example, after being struck with a blindness that leaves his family's survival in question, Tobit, who exemplifies the righteous Jew, cries out

> You are righteous, O Lord (κύριε), and all your works and all your ways are merciful deeds and truth, and you judge forever with a true and righteous judgement. Remember me (μνήσθητί μου) and look upon me; do not punish me for my sins and my mistakes and those of my fathers, the sins which they committed before you. (Tob 3:2–3)

As this request and the larger prayer bears out, Tobit fears that his own sins and those of his kin might lead to judgement and death.[20] Therefore, he asks God to

17. See Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 171–172.

18. See Judith H. Newman, *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: SBL, 1999).

19. Newman, *Praying by the Book*, 12–13.

20. See Tob 3:2-6.

'remember', that is, to act upon his prior promise of mercy and protection for Abraham's descendants.

Similarly, in Baruch, the author sees a connection between political oppression, exile, and the nation's guilt. Consequently, the cries uttered to God include requests such as

> O Lord (κύριε) almighty, God of Israel (ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραήλ), hear now the prayer of those of Israel who have died and the sons who sin before you, those who have not heard the voice of the Lord their God and evils have clung to us. Do not remember (μὴ μνησθῇς) the unrighteous deeds of our fathers, but remember (μνήσθητι) your hand and your name in this time. (Bar 3:4-5)[21]

In typical lament fashion, the speaker attempts to motivate a merciful response from God by appealing to the divine reputation and what might happen to that reputation if Israel's prayers are left unanswered.[22] The request μνήσθητι appeals specifically to God's prior promise of protection and mercy, which echoes a psalmist's request: 'Do not remember (μὴ μνησθῇς) the sins of my youth and do not remember (μὴ μνησθῇς) my sins committed in ignorance; according to your mercy remember me (μνήσθητί μου)' (Ps 24:7 LXX). As I will discuss below, the same psalm is likely echoed in the criminal's request in Luke 23:42.[23]

3.2 Remembrance, Enemies, and Israel's Story

Requests for divine remembrance often occur in instances where enemies afflict the petitioner and or lamenter. For example, when Judas Maccabaeus attempts to inspire his army as they prepare to face the Seleucid commander Gorgias in battle, he calls for his troops to cry out for deliverance: 'And now let us cry for help (βοήσωμεν) to heaven; if he wants us he will also remember (μνσηθήσεται) the covenant of the fathers and he will crush this army' (1 Macc 4:10). There is a clear link here between the request for deliverance from enemies and asking God to remember, or act upon, his prior promise of protection for Abraham's descendants.

Petitioners may also ask God to remember how their enemies have slandered his people and his name. The Maccabean era once again provides an

21. See the wider prayer in Bar 3:1-8.

22. See Miller, *They Cried to the Lord.*

23. Qumran writers likewise connect prayers for remembrance to a community's sin and guilt. See, e.g., 4QDibHam^{a} 5 II, 2; 3 II, 3. I have limited the scope in this article to explicit uses of the Greek imperative μνήσθητι. For a discussion of fragments of lament in the Qumran corpus, see Crisler, *Echoes of Lament*, 117–122.

example. When the Seleucid commander Nicanor threatens to burn the temple unless Judas Maccabaeus is handed over to him, the priests cry out in prayer

> You chose this house for your name to be called upon it for it to be a house of prayer and supplication for your people; execute vengeance against this man and his army, and let them fall by the sword; remember (μνήσθητι) their insults and do not let them live any longer. (1 Macc 7:37-38)

We see once again an appeal to the divine reputation and a reliance on a prior promise that God would crush those who reproach him and his people.

Besides explicit requests such as μνήσθητι, we are also informed by Second Temple writers who summarise God's deliverance of Israel as remembrance. Israel's 'story' is a story of God 'remembering' his promises to his people and acting accordingly. Divine remembrance in fact introduces and triggers Israel's deliverance from Egypt according to the narrator of Exodus. When God hears the cries of his people, he remembers his prior promise to Abraham: 'And God heard their cry and remembered (ἐμνήσθη) his covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob' (Exod 2:24). Second Temple petitioners show an awareness of this dynamic in their individual and communal prayers such as 'Blessed is the man, whose Lord remembered (ἐμνήσθη) in reproving, and he was surrounded from the evil way to be cleansed from sin so as not to be multiplied' (Pss. Sol. 10:1) or 'And the Lord will remember his servants in mercy; for the testimony is in the law of the eternal covenant, the testimony of the Lord is upon the ways of men in visitation' (Pss. Sol. 10:4).[24] Additionally, prior to battle, Judas Maccabaeus encourages his troops to cry out to God and appeal specifically to divine remembrance: 'And now let us cry to heaven, if he will want us and he will remember (μνσθήσεται) the covenant of the fathers and he will crush this army before us today' (1 Macc 4:10). In short, Second Temple petitioners appeal to divine remembrance as a way of 'motivating' Israel's God to act on their behalf and to praise him.

3.3 Summary of Second Temple Remembrance

To summarise, petitioners/lamenters who cry out for divine remembrance are requesting that God act upon his promise to hear the cries of his people and deliver them from various afflictions, most notably enemies, death, and judgement. Multifaceted forms of deliverance emerge from divine remembrance. In keeping with lament in Israel's Scriptures, deliverance in the examples discussed above either comes in the form of (1) a reiteration of the prior promise of deliverance or (2) actual deliverance. God either reinforces

24. See also Test. of Job 40:4.

his promise to 'remember' and deliver, or he carries out that deliverance in real time.

Those who utter such requests are likely influenced, at least in some instances, by cries for remembrance in Israel's Scriptures. In keeping with prayers for remembrance articulated by their scriptural predecessors, Second Temple petitioners limit their request for remembrance to YHWH alone. As with other fragments of lament in Second Temple literature, petitioners routinely direct cries for remembrance to Israel's God, as the preceding discussion indicates.[25] What we do not find are cries for remembrance directed towards human agents. Remembrance then is one way that Second Temple writers expressed the uniqueness of Israel's God and how he related to his people. As we shall see, the exchange between Jesus and the criminal reflects some of the same characteristics of laments for divine remembrance.

4. Echoes of Divine Remembrance in the Criminal's Request

We now turn our attention to the intertextual subtext of the criminal's request. The lament μνήσθητί μου occurs eight times in the canonical LXX, which, as noted above, stand behind cries for remembrance in the 'apocryphal' LXX. Of these eight uses, only the cry in Genesis 40:14 is directed towards someone other than Israel's God. The interplay between Septuagintal requests of μνήσθητί μου directed to God and the same request directed to the Lukan Jesus produce some informative Christological points of resonance.[26] While many of the LXX uses have tangential parallels with the Luke 23:42, the requests for divine remembrance in Psalm 24 LXX provide the main intertextual subtext for the criminal's cry.

4.1 Echoes of Joseph in μνήσθητί μου?

In Genesis 40, after an imprisoned Joseph successfully interprets the dream of Pharaoh's imprisoned cupbearer, he makes one request of him: 'But remember me (μνήσθητί μου) through yourself, whenever things should be well for you, and do mercy with me and remind (μνησθήσῃ) Pharaoh about me and bring me out of this prison' (Gen 40:14). The pre-text and Lukan text here are an exact match grammatically and semantically. We also find some contextual consistency. Based on the interpreted dream, the cupbearer is scheduled to re-enter Pharaoh's kingdom and Joseph asks the cupbearer to remember

25. For an extensive discussion on the wider phenomenon of fragments of lament in Second Temple literature, see Crisler, *Echoes of Lament*, 86–129.

26. For various suggested Old Testament pre-texts in Luke 23:42-43, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 203–233.

him (μνήσθητί μου) and to remind (μνησθήσῃ) Pharaoh about him at that time. These circumstances bear some resemblance to the criminal in Luke's crucifixion scene who asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus enters his kingdom (μνήσθητί μου ὅταν ἔλθῃς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου).

However, despite these parallels, stark differences are present. While it is true that Joseph and the penitent criminal both face punishment from authorities, the former is innocent, while the latter, by his own admission, is not (Luke 23:41). Therefore, unlike other scriptural examples and the Second Temple milieu, Joseph's use of μνήσθητί μου has no link to his own sin and guilt. Moreover, the cupbearer in the Genesis narrative is merely a servant within Pharaoh's court while the criminal's request is a tacit admission that Jesus himself is a king. Simply put, Pharaoh's cupbearer is not a strong biographical match with Jesus nor is Joseph a strong match with the criminal.

4.2 Other Septuagintal Uses of μνήσθητί μου

Other uses of μνήσθητί μου also contain parallels with the criminal's request. For example, in Judges 16, as a chained, blinded, and ridiculed Samson leans within the house of his enemies, he cries out (ἐβόησεν) 'Lord, Lord, (κύριε, κύριε) remember me (μνήσθητί μου) and strengthen me yet one more time, and I will carry out one act of vengeance from these Philistines in return for my two eyes' (Judg 16:28). Along with the grammatical and semantic match between pre-text and text, Samson's request, like that of the penitent criminal, is linked to his own sin and guilt. Samson faces divine punishment at the hands of his enemies because he violated his Nazirite vow. Some congruity also exists between Samson's desire for vengeance against his enemies and the criminal's reference to Jesus entering his kingdom. I will return to this below.

The request μνήσθητί μου occurs once in Jeremiah as part of the prophet's lament against his enemies. He cries out 'O Lord, remember me and visit me and avenge me before all those persecute me, not in forbearance' (Jer 15:15a). The context of Jeremiah's μνήσθητί μου implies that Jeremiah is asking God to act upon his prior promise to avenge him as a righteous figure against his enemies. This example is not entirely unrelated to our concern here given the way Jesus, whom the centurion describes as δίκαιος, participates in the criminal's lament. I will return to this below.

Nehemiah utters the request μνήσθητί μου to God four times in his prayers. First, when it appears that Nehemiah might be partially responsible for the 'social depression' taking hold among the people as a result of his zealous construction efforts, he cries out 'Remember me (μνήσθητί μου), O

God (ὁ θεός), for all the good, as much as I did for this people' (Neh 5:19).[27] Similarly, the three other occurrences of the request μνήσθητί μου 'punctuate' Nehemiah's account of the reforms he enacted after Israel's return from exile.[28] These include:

> Remember me (μνήσθητί μου), O God (ὁ θεός), for all the good, as much as I did for this people. (Neh 13:14)
>
> Remember me (μνήσθητί μου), O God (ὁ θεός), and spare me according to the multitude of your mercy. (Neh 13:22b)
>
> Remember me (μνήσθητί μου), our God (ὁ θεός), for goodness. (Neh 13:31b)

All four requests contain the divine vocative ὁ θεός and assume that God will act on his prior promise to bless those who bless his people.[29] Obviously, Nehemiah's cries overlap with the criminal's semantically and syntactically, though Ἰησοῦ replaces ὁ θεός. Conceptually, tangential consistency occurs at the point of both Nehemiah and the criminal seeking divine protection and forgiveness. Nevertheless, as with the Joseph pre-text described above, Nehemiah and the criminal are not a strong biographical match. The former has a long history of faithful service to Israel's God while the latter spontaneously cries out in his guilt to Jesus.

Finally, the request μνήσθητί μου occurs in an individual psalm of lament in which the lamenter asks God to both 'remember' and to 'remember not':

> Remember (μνήσθητι) your compassions, O Lord (κύριε), and your mercies because they are from long ago. Do not remember (μὴ μνησθῇς) the sins of my youth and my acts of ignorance; according to your mercy remember me (μνήσθητί μου). (Ps 24:6-7 LXX)

The wider context of the psalm identifies the lamenter's source of suffering as a combination of concerns with sin, guilt, and oppressive enemies. Deliverance from enemies depends upon God's forgiveness of the lamenter's sin. With

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27. William Dumbrell observes 'Nehemiah appears responsible for the social depression that may have resulted from the community's overcommitment to wall-building' (William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 319).

28. Dumbrell notes 'Nehemiah concludes by giving an account of the reform he initiated, punctuated by calls to God to remember him (13:14,22,29), reaching a crescendo in 13:31' (Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 322).

29. See, e.g., Gen 12:1-3.

the request μνήσθητί μου, the lamenter requests that God act upon his prior promise to forgive and then deliver from enemies.[30]

Several salient points emerge from these seven uses of μνήσθητί μου. First, those who utter this cry appeal to prior promises of forgiveness, vindication, and or deliverance. Second, the request μνήσθητί μου assumes its inverse which is for God to essentially 'forget' the guilt of the petitioner. Third, the ethos of those who make this request is bold and humble at the same time. Finally, all seven instances of μνήσθητί μου are accompanied by the divine vocative ὁ θεός or κύριε.

4.3 Christological Implications of LXX Pre-Texts

When we read the criminal's request against this intertextual backdrop, multiple Christological implications emerge. To begin, the timing of the request is suggestive of Jesus's divinely relational identity. Here in the waning moments of his life the criminal asks something of Jesus that figures such as Samson and psalmists, also in the waning moments of their lives, only ask of YHWH.

Second, in concert with the timing of the request, the content of the criminal's request is also suggestive of Jesus's divinely relational identity. The request μνήσθητί μου is lament shorthand for seeking forgiveness, vindication from enemies, and deliverance from judgement in accordance with YHWH's prior promise. However, with his request μνήσθητί μου, the criminal seeks the totality of these promised actions from Jesus. Entrance into Jesus's kingdom supplies the forgiveness, vindication, and deliverance that the criminal seeks.

Third, Jesus's response to the request 'Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise' suggests that he can answer the criminal in a way only equalled by Israel's God, namely through a command, promise, or act of deliverance. The reaffirmation of a promise often functions as a divine answer in the Psalms of lament and an immediate act of deliverance characterises YHWH's response to Samson. Both means of a divine answer are on display in the crucifixion scene. Jesus promises that the criminal will be with him while simultaneously participating in the act of deliverance that will fulfil the promise.

Finally, given these three Christological implications, it follows that the vocative Ἰησοῦ has divine connotations. Just as Luke narratively builds out the full meaning of the title κύριος over the course of his biography, something

30. Cf. the way a plea for mercy precedes cries for deliverance from enemies in Psalm 142 LXX.

similar happens here with the address 'Jesus'.[31] Prior occurrences of Ἰησοῦ in Luke involve figures who cry out to Jesus for deliverance from sin, disease, death, enemies, and judgement.[32] Moreover, in Acts, those who hear the apostolic kerygma are urged to call upon the name of Jesus for salvation, which indicates that it bears a divine sense. The prime example is of course Stephen, who reconfigures the Lukan Jesus's dying lament with his own κύριε Ἰησοῦ, δέξαι τὸ πνεῦμα μου (Acts 7:59).[33] That move is anticipated in those who call on Jesus's name over the course of Luke's Gospel and climactically in the way the criminal calls upon his name.

Overall, when the timing, content, response, and vocative of the criminal's request are read in relation to the intertextual subtext of lament that informs it, the Christological implication emerges that Jesus relates to the dying criminal in a way that YHWH relates to those seeking mercy and forgiveness in the face of death according to his prior promise. The criminal's cry for remembrance, with all it entails, evokes similar cries from Israel's Scriptures and is consistent with cries for remembrance directed to YHWH in the Second Temple milieu.

5. Intratextual Laments to Jesus in Luke

The exchange between the penitent, or lamenting, criminal and Jesus is linked to two larger features of Luke's Gospel. These intratextual features shed further light on the criminal's request for divine remembrance and its Christological implications.

5.1 Remembrance in the Magnificat and Benedictus

The references to divine remembrance in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and the Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79) in Luke's opening frame form an *inclusio* with the criminal's reference to remembrance in the crucifixion scene. As interpreters often note, the OT shapes almost every strophe in Mary's song. This includes the reference to divine remembrance at the close of the song – 'He has helped

31. On the development of the Christological title κύριος in Luke see C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke*, BZNW 139 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110921878.

32. See the use of Ἰησοῦ in Luke 5:8; 8:28; 17:13; 18:38. As Wilson concludes in his comparison of the vocative Ἰησοῦ in Luke, 'If the penitent criminal's use of Jesus's name is read in light of these parallels, the vocative Ἰησοῦ may characterize the criminal as a helpless and marginalized supplicant seeking mercy from Jesus in faith' (Wilson, 'Directly Addressing "Jesus"', 449).

33. For a full discussion on Stephen's use of OT lament language and his imitation of Jesus's lament, see Channing L. Crisler, 'Standing to Answer Stephen's Lament: A Reappraisal of Why Jesus Stands in Acts 7:55-56', *JLCR* 3 (2022), 1–16.

Israel his servant, by remembering his mercy (μνησθῆναι ἐλέους), just as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever' (Luke 1:54-55). The infinitive construction μνησθῆναι ἐλέους evokes prayer language from Israel's Scriptures such as 'The Lord made known his salvation, before the nations he has revealed his righteousness. He has remembered his mercy (ἐμνήσθη τοῦ ἐλέους αὐτοῦ) to Jacob and his truth to the house of Israel' (Ps 97:2-3 LXX). Similarly, Zechariah's prophetic Benedictus highlights divine remembrance and its soteriological implications:

> Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who has visited and done redemption for his people, and he has raised a horn of salvation for us in the house of David his servant, just as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from long ago, salvation from our enemies and from the hand of those who hate us, to do mercy with our fathers and to remember his holy covenant (μνησθῆναι διαθήκης αὐτοῦ), which he swore to Abraham our father, to give to us, having been delivered from the hand of our enemies, to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all of our days. (Luke 1:68-75)

Both Mary and Zechariah tether remembrance to the prior promise that God made to Abraham and his descendants. They both qualify the promise and its fulfilment as divine mercy. The births of John and Jesus signal that God has mercifully answered the cries of his people, cries for forgiveness, for vindication before enemies, and for deliverance from divine judgement. In other words, with the arrival of John and Jesus, God has answered the cry for remembrance encapsulated later in the criminal's request μνήσθητί μου.[34]

5.2 Jesus's Lament as the Embodiment of Remembrance

This brings us to the second intratextual feature that is tied to the criminal's lament. After Luke identifies Jesus as the embodiment of divine remembrance in the songs of Zechariah and Mary, the wider swathe of his narrative features scenes in which afflicted individuals cry out to Jesus. I have written extensively on these individual episodes of lament elsewhere, but I will simply list them here.[35] They include: (1) cries for forgiveness (Luke 5:4-11; 7:36-50); (2) cries for healing (Luke 17:12-19; 18:35-43); (3) cries for deliverance from death (Luke 7:1-10,11-17); and cries for deliverance from evil (Luke 8:22-25,26-39; 9:37-

34. Luke 1–2 highlights multiple figures who faithfully pray, or cry out, to God for the redemption of Israel. See, e.g., Luke 1:13; 2:25-32,36-38.

35. See Crisler, *Echoes of Lament*, 130–193; Crisler, *Synoptic Christology of Lament*.

43). Jesus answers each of these cries in a way that surpasses his prophetic predecessors and is only equalled by YHWH himself.

What we find then intratextually is a literary framework which encases Jesus's willingness and ability to answer cries for forgiveness, vindication, and deliverance from judgement. On one side of the narrative, Mary and Zechariah praise God that in Jesus he has remembered, or acted upon, his prior promise. On the other side, the criminal cries out to Jesus that he would remember, or act upon, this prior promise. The reader who follows the narrative between these two poles knows that Jesus has commanded the deliverance of multiple individuals who cried out for mercy. In this climactic scene, Jesus promises to remember the criminal in a way that only YHWH can promise – an immediate entrance into paradise. However, Jesus does not command deliverance in this moment, because the entrance to paradise requires that he not only answer lament but participate in it. This is precisely what Jesus does in his own dying words as he utters a cry of trust and a request for vindication: 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46; Ps 30:6 LXX). In this way, Jesus's remembrance of the criminal overlaps with the Father's remembrance of Jesus which unfolds in the resurrection. As Peter puts it in his Pentecost sermon, through his citation of Psalm 16, 'You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor will give your holy one to see decay' (Acts 2:27; Ps 15:10 LXX). In other words, the Father remembered the Son so that the Son could remember the criminal. While Jesus does not explicitly request that God 'remember' him in the vein of the lamenting criminal, his statement of trust reflects the 'ethos of lament' and is tantamount to asking that he not be forgotten in death.[36]

6. Divine Remembrance and Early Reception History

One more consideration in this discussion stems from the early reception history of the criminal's lament as it may be reflected in literary and epigraphic evidence which spans the second to seventh centuries AD. I offer here brief reflection on four possible references to 'remember me' that seem to recognise the Christological implications of the criminal's lament in Luke.

6.1 An Adaptation of the Criminal's Cry in the Didache

To begin, as part of its Eucharist instructions, the Didache includes an accompanying prayer which contains the request μνήσθητι, κύριε, τῆς

36. On Jesus and the 'ethos of lament', see the discussion in Rebekah Eklund, *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus' Lament in the New Testament*, LNTS 515 (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 18–20.

ἐκκλησίας σου ('Remember, O Lord, your church').[37] While earlier vocatives in the prayer address God as 'Holy Father' (πάτερ ἅγιε) and 'Almighty Master' (δέσποτα παντοκράτορ), the vocative shifts to the 'Lord' (κύριε) of the church in verse 5. The request for remembrance then is clearly directed to Jesus as confirmed by the closing μαραναθά in verse 6. The request μνήσθητι is followed by prayer language that appears in Matthew and Luke:

> Remember, Lord, your church, to deliver it from all evil and to perfect it in your love, and gather it from the four winds, that which has been sanctified, for your kingdom (εἰς τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν), which you prepared for it; because yours is the power and the glory forever. (Did 10:5)

The speaker's request that Jesus remember to deliver the church from all evil (ῥύσασθαι αὐτὴν ἀπὸ παντὸς πονηροῦ) evokes Matthew 6:13. However, I am more interested at this point in the prepositional phrase εἰς τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν (Did 10:5). It bears a striking resemblance to the phrase at the end of the criminal's request, 'Remember me when you enter into your kingdom (εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου).' The latter phrase only occurs in Luke 23:42. It follows that the Didache's combination of μνήσθητι and εἰς τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν may echo the criminal's request with its accompanying Christological implications.

6.2 The Criminal's Cry in the Gospel of Nicodemus

In the Gospel of Nicodemus, also known as the Acts of Pilate, the penitent criminal, whom the author identifies as Dysmas (Δυσμᾶς), utters a version of the Lukan request, μνήθητί μου, κύριε, ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου (Gos. Nic. 10:2).[38] When this request is read in relation to the document's wider Christology, it further supports the perceived divinity of Jesus. The writer's expansion of the canonical material underscores this wider Christological perception.[39] For example, as Jesus is brought before Pilate, the Roman standards bow in worship. The author notes 'As Jesus entered, while the standard bearers were

37. See Did. 10:1-7. See also references to divine remembrance in Ign. Eph. 21:1; Diog. 9:2.

38. There are a few obvious differences between the request in Luke 23:42 and the request in Gos. Nic. 10:2. In the latter, the vocative is κύριε rather than Ἰησοῦ. The criminal's request in Gos. Nic. does not contain ὅταν ἔλθῃς. Finally, Luke 23:42 contains the prepositional phrase εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου while Gos. Nic. contains ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου.

39. On this point, see Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 421.

holding the standards, the images at the tops of the standards bowed forward and worshipped Jesus (προσεκύνησαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ)' (Gos. Nic. 1:5).[40]

Additionally, some of the witnesses who testify before Pilate are described as those who had cried out (κράζω) to Jesus for healing and had their requests answered in a way only equalled by Israel's God.[41] This wider emphasis on Jesus's divinity, communicated through Roman standards bowing in worship and through witnesses who had their cries answered by Jesus, implies that Dysmas's request μνήθητί μου reflects the original Christological implication of a Lukan Jesus who relates to those who cry out to him as only Israel's God can.

6.3 An Epigraphic Echo of the Criminal's Cry

When we turn our attention to epigraphic evidence, the necropolis at Beth-Sheʿarim provides one suggestive consideration. Hall A in Catacomb 18 contained a Greek funerary inscription on a lintel (300–500 CE) that reads as follows:

> Κύριε μνήσθηθι τῆς δούλης σου Πρειμόσας
> Κύριε μνήσθηθι τοῦ δούλου σου Σακέρδωτος
>
> Lord, remember your servant Primosa.
> Lord, remember your servant Sacerdos.[42]

Jonathan Price labels this inscription as 'an ownership inscription' that marked the graves of either a husband and wife or siblings. In his analysis of the inscription, Price notes the request here is 'not a formula that Jews used'.[43] He then adds, 'Christians used the term δοῦλοι for believers with the verbs μνήσθηθι, βοήθησον, σῶσον, et al. in church dedications and spontaneous invocations in graffiti.'[44] What can be added to this analysis is that these kinds of requests, including Κύριε μνήσθηθι τοῦ δούλου σου, are prayers, dying prayers placed on the lips of the dead by those who wrote funerary inscriptions resembling the request uttered by Luke's lamenting criminal. While it is possible that additional scriptural sources such as the Psalms influenced this

40. See also Gos. Nic. 1:6.

41. See, e.g., Gos. Nic. 6:2 (Matt 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43); 7:1 (Matt 9:20-21; Mark 5:25-29; Luke 8:42-46). Lukan influence is especially evident in the author's repeated use of the Christological title ὁ δίκαιος. See Gos. Nic. 12:1.

42. Text and translation from *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae* (*CIIP*) 5.7163.

43. *CIIP* 5.7163.

44. *CIIP* 5.7163.

inscription, it is probable that it reflects the request in Luke 23:42.[45] As Pieter W. van der Horst notes in his analysis of the inscription, 'This is surely more than just a request to God to recall the deceased now and then. It has rightly been remarked that the word μνήσθητι could be interpreted in light of the usage in Lk. 23.42-43.'[46] Therefore, the dying request of these two individuals, like the criminal, may reflect the belief in Jesus's divinely relational identity.

Epigraphic echoes of μνήσθητι go beyond the lintel at Beth-Sheʿarim. For example, in the so-called 'Cave of the Sisters of Mercy' at Bethany, graffiti from the fifth to sixth centuries AD include a request that weds the Johannine narrative of Lazarus's resurrection to the criminal's request in Luke: 'O Lord God, the one who raised Lazarus from the dead, remember your servant (μνήσθητι τοῦ δουλοῦ σου).'[47] The inscription uses the vocative κύριε ὁ θεός, explicitly identifying Jesus as the God who raised Lazarus from the dead, and then voices a dying request to God, 'remember your servant', which evokes the criminal's dying cry to Jesus in Luke.

7. Conclusion

To return to the Synaxarion for a moment, the request 'remember me' is a key to unlocking Luke's Christology, and thereby early Christology, when we understand that it carries the theological freight of Old Testament lament into the crucifixion scene. What the criminal seeks from Jesus in the waning moments of his life is forgiveness, vindication, and deliverance from judgement.[48] These needs are encapsulated in the cry μνήσθητί μου, which our analysis of Second Temple fragments of lament and intertextual analysis of Luke 23:42 bears out.

Nevertheless, while the criminal's cry, both in its timing and content, resembles similar cries from Israel's past, its unique element is the divine vocative Ἰησοῦ. In the face of death, the criminal asks of Jesus what figures in Israel's Scriptures and the Second Temple era only asked of YHWH. By asking Jesus to remember him, the criminal seeks forgiveness for sin and

45. The phrase μνήσθητι τὸν λόγον σου τῷ δούλῳ σου occurs in Ps 118:49 LXX, which is obviously close to the wording reflected in the Beth-Sheʿarim inscription.

46. See Pieter W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE–700 CE)* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), 118.

47. *CIIP* 1.2.842.1. The cave appears to have been a pilgrimage site, perhaps to commemorate Jesus's stay at Bethany, between c. fourth to seventh centuries CE, and the graffiti may be from c. fifth to sixth centuries CE.

48. Some commentators recognise that the criminal's ethos reflects Old Testament petitioners, though not in the more developed way that I offer here. See, e.g., Wolter, *Gospel According to Luke*, 2:529.

deliverance from the judgement that he readily admits he deserves when he rebukes the unrepentant criminal. This ability to answer such a dying request is hidden in the fact that Jesus shares in the same judgement as the one who cries out to him. However, from an intratextual perspective, the Lukan reader has been prepared for this climactic request. Over the course of the Lukan narrative, Jesus has demonstrated a willingness and ability to answer cries for forgiveness, vindication, healing, life, and deliverance from judgement in a variety of settings. Here those requests and answers are folded into the criminal's request 'remember me' and Jesus's statement of trust, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'

The latter kind of lament has not been the focus of this article, but it is relevant to understanding the criminal's request and the promise of paradise. Only by sharing in the same judgement and kind of lament can Jesus fully grant the criminal's request. He must depend on the Father to remember him if he is to remember the criminal. This is what makes him righteous (δίκαιος) as the centurion puts it (Luke 23:47). He is the righteous divine king who relates to the people in accordance with the prior promise that Mary and Zechariah sang about by sharing in their darkest moment and in their deepest need. In this way, he relates to them in a way that God had always promised. He remembers them by visiting them, suffering with them, and answering them. Subsequent Christians, facing their own deaths, seems to take a cue from the criminal. In their prayers and even on their tombs, they ask for Jesus to remember them as the criminal asked. They trust that Jesus will remember them in the same way that the Father remembered Jesus by not allowing his holy one to undergo decay. In this way, the Jewish lament 'remember me' is indeed a key to unlocking Luke's divinely relational Christology, one understood by Luke and subsequent generations of his readers whose own laments were shaped by a criminal's cry for remembrance.

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