

THE DISPENSATIONAL AND KINGDOM IMPLICATIONS OF THE 'LORD'S  
PRAYER' IN MATTHEW 6:9-13

**Introduction**

The contemporary evangelical world is engulfed in the idea that the church is presently experiencing the messianic kingdom. The idea of the "kingdom" can be bewildering, especially considering how this term is loosely bandied about by today's evangelicals. Many ministries convey the notion that the kingdom is strictly a spiritual and present reality by indicating that they are "expanding the kingdom" through their evangelistic and missionary endeavors. Even Christian political activists sometimes argue that they are "bringing in the kingdom."

Such "kingdom now" theology factors prominently in the writings of various Emergent Church writers. Doug Pagitt proclaims, "And let me tell you 'Kingdom of God' language is really big in the emerging church."<sup>1</sup> Brian McLaren echoes:

He selected 12 and trained them in a new way of life. He sent them to teach everyone this new way of life...Even if only a few would practice this new way, many would benefit. Oppressed people would be free. Poor people would be liberated from poverty. Minorities would be treated with respect. Sinners would be loved, not resented. Industrialists would realize that God cares for sparrows and wildflowers-so their industries should respect, not rape, the environment. The homeless would be invited in for a hot meal. The kingdom of God would come-not everywhere at once, not suddenly, but gradually like a seed growing in a field, like yeast spreading in a lump of bread dough, like light spreading across the sky at dawn.<sup>2</sup>

McLaren further observes: "If Revelation were a blueprint of the distant future, it would have been unintelligible to its original readers...In light of this, Revelation becomes a powerful book about the kingdom of God here and now, available to all."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone* (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails, 2007), 163.

<sup>2</sup> Brian McClaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 111.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Oakland, *Faith Undone*, 158.

Mega-church pastor and bestselling author Rick Warren epitomizes the "kingdom now" vocabulary and mentality that is so prevalent in the modern evangelical church, when he says:

I stand before you confidently right now and say to you that God is going to use you to change the world...I'm looking at a stadium full of people right now who are telling God they will do *whatever it takes to establish God's Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven."* What will happen if the followers of Jesus say to Him, "We are yours?" What kind of spiritual awakening will occur? (italics added).<sup>4</sup>

Note also the words of Russell Moore, President of the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention: "The locus of the kingdom of God in this age is within the church, where Jesus rules as king. As we live our lives together, we see the transforming power of the gospel and the in breaking of the future kingdom."<sup>5</sup> Many other evangelicals also believe that Christ inaugurated the kingdom in spiritual form during His First Advent.<sup>6</sup> One way of showing the implausibility of this proposition is by exploring the true meaning of the so called "Lord's Prayer" found in Matthew 6:9-13.

## **Matthew's Argument**

### *Matthew's Jewish-Christian Audience*

Understanding Matthew's overall argument helps elucidate the meaning of Matthew 6:9-13. Although no specific target audience is mentioned, various clues make it apparent that Matthew had a believing Jewish audience in mind.<sup>7</sup> The Jewish nature of the book is apparent by noting several factors. First, the book contains a disproportionate

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<sup>4</sup> Warren cited in Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*, 153.

<sup>5</sup> Justin Taylor, "An Interview with Russell Moore," [www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org).

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion* (Tyler: TX: ICE, 1997), 223-26.

<sup>7</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980; reprint, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2005), 15-18.

number of Old Testament citations and allusions. Of the book's 129 Old Testament references, 53 are direct citations and 76 are allusions. On thirteen occasions, Christ's actions are said to be a fulfillment of the Old Testament. Second, the book follows a fivefold division. The five major sermons of the book are delineated through the repetition of the concluding formula "when He had finished saying these things" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This fivefold structure would have immediately been recognizable to the Jewish mind since Jews had a tendency to categorize items, such as the Book of Psalms and the Pentateuch, according to a fivefold division. Third, although originally written in Greek, the book evidences a Hebraistic style, parallelism, and elaboration.

Fourth, *tote* ("then" or "at that time") reflects a Jewish style. While this term is employed ninety times in Matthew, it is only used six times in Mark, fourteen times in Luke, and ten times in John. Fifth, the vocabulary of the book is distinctly Jewish. The following Jewish terms are found in the book: David, Jerusalem as the Holy City (4:5; 27:53), city of the great king (5:35), lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:6; 15:24), kingdom of God, and kingdom of heaven.<sup>8</sup> Sixth, the subject matter of the topics covered is distinctly Jewish. Among the topics covered are the Law, ceremonial defilements, Sabbath, kingdom, Jerusalem, temple, Messiah, prophecy, prophets, David, Abram, Moses, scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees.

Seventh, Matthew's genealogy reveals a Jewish audience. Matthew traces Christ back to David and Abraham rather than back to Adam (Luke 3). Eighth, Matthew places a special focus upon the Apostle Peter. Because Peter was the apostle to the circumcised (Gal 2:7-8), Matthew's focus on Peter harmonizes with the Jewish emphasis

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, "kingdom of heaven" appears thirty one times (3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11, 12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1, 3, 4, 23; 19:14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1) and "kingdom of God" (6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43) appears only five times. These terms are synonymous (Matt 19:23-24). However, the multiple references to the former and the scant references to the latter also reflect a common Jewish reluctance of mentioning God's name directly.

of his book. Ninth, unlike the other Gospels that explain Jewish customs to Gentile audiences, Matthew leaves these same Jewish customs unexplained. This is true not only with regard to Jewish rulers (Matt 2:1, 22; 14:1; Luke 2:1-2; 3:1-2) but it is also true with regard to ceremonial cleansing (Matt 15:2; Mark 7:3-4). The customs that Matthew does explain are of Roman rather than Jewish origin (Matt 27:15). Although some of Matthew's writings seem to anticipate at least some kind of Gentile audience by giving the interpretation of some Jewish words (1:23; 27:33, 46), it does seem to be a general rule that Matthew provides fewer interpretations of Jewish customs than any other Gospel writer.

Tenth, various church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius believed that Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience. Not only was Matthew written to a Jewish audience but to a believing audience as well. In other words, Matthew's audience primarily consisted of Jewish Christians. Both Eusebius<sup>9</sup> and Origen<sup>10</sup> indicated that Matthew was written to those within Judaism who came to believe.

#### *Matthew's Purpose and Argument*

Matthew wrote in order to accomplish three *purposes*.<sup>11</sup> First, he wrote to convince his Jewish audience that the Christ in whom they had believed was indeed the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Thus, Matthew shows that Christ was the rightful heir to the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. Matthew appeals to a variety of devices to accomplish this purpose such as genealogies, fulfilled prophecy, messianic titles, kingdom teachings, and miracles. Because the Jewish understanding was that the kingdom would be immediately established upon the arrival of the king (Isa 9:6-7; Matt

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<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.24.6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.25.4.

<sup>11</sup> Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 18-20.

20:20-21), the next logical question that a Jew would ask is, “if Christ is indeed the Jewish king then where is His kingdom?”

Thus, Matthew wrote for the second purpose of explaining why the kingdom had been postponed despite the fact that the king had already arrived. In order to accomplish this purpose, Matthew carefully traces the kingdom program. Here Matthew explains the kingdom’s offer to the nation (3:2; 4:17; 10:5-7; 15:24), its rejection by the nation (11–12; 21–23; 26–27), the present interim program for those who will inherit the kingdom (sons of the kingdom) due to Israel’s rejection of the kingdom (13; 16:18), and the nation’s eventual acceptance of the kingdom (23:38-39; 24:14, 31; 25:31). The notion of a past rejection and future acceptance of the kingdom by national Israel would lead to the question, “what is God doing in the present?”

Thus, Matthew wrote for the third purpose of explaining God’s interim program. Here, Matthew introduces the interim program that the sons of the kingdom will experience (Matt 13), as well as the advent of the church (Matt 16:18; 18:17; 28:18-20). The Church Age represents God’s present earthly program between Israel’s past rejection and future acceptance of the King and His kingdom. Since Christ’s disciples would play foundational roles in the church (Eph 2:20), Matthew explains how Christ prepared them not only for His death but also for their new role in the Church Age.

At the time of writing, the Gentiles were becoming more prominent in the church. The Jewish believers needed an explanation for this Gentile inclusion. Thus, Matthew explains how God’s interim program would thrust the Gentiles into prominence (2:1-12; 8:11-12; 13:38; 15:22-28). In sum, Matthew selectively (John 20:30-31; 21:25) includes material from Christ’s life in order to accomplish these purposes. Therefore, the *message* of Matthew is the confirmation to Jewish Christians that Jesus is their predicted king who ushered in an interim program by building the sons of the kingdom into the church in between Israel’s past rejection and future acceptance of her King.

In addition to this overarching purpose, Matthew wrote to accomplish three sub-purposes. *First*, Matthew wanted to confirm the Jewish Christians in their faith. He wanted them to understand that the Jesus in whom they had believed was indeed the Jewish king. This was true in spite of the fact that the kingdom had not immediately materialized according to their expectations and instead God's program had taken a new direction. *Second*, Matthew wrote to offer the believing Jews an explanation regarding Gentile inclusion in God's present program. This was an explanation that the believing Jews desperately needed since the church was on the verge of becoming predominately Gentile through the coming three missionary journeys launched from Syrian Antioch. Thus, Matthew wrote his Gospel from this very locale for the purpose of assisting the church through this delicate transition. *Third*, Matthew wanted to encourage the Jewish Christians. Thus, he explained that although Israel had rejected her king, God was going to use this negative act for the positive purpose of including the Gentiles. He was also going to restore the kingdom to Israel in the future.

#### *Matthew's Structure*

A major structural clue in Matthew's Gospel is the repetition of the concluding phrase "when He had finished saying these things" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This formula alerts the reader to the book's five major discourses. Each discourse concludes with this phrase. Thus, the five major discourses include the Sermon on the Mount (5–7), the missionary discourse (10), the kingdom parables (13), the discourse on humility (18), and the Olivet Discourse (24–25).<sup>12</sup>

In order to explain to his Jewish-Christian audience how Christ can be the Jewish king and yet at the same time the Jewish kingdom is absent and the Gentiles are prominent in the mystery age, Matthew develops a well-organized argument. First, he

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

establishes Christ's messianic identity and traces Christ's offer of the kingdom to Israel (1–10). Second, he shows the nation's rejection of this offer (11–12; 20:29–23:39). Third, he explains God's inclusion of the Gentiles in the mystery age during the kingdom's absence and postponement (13:1–20:28). Matthew then develops the final part of his argument. Although the kingdom has been postponed in the present, it will be re-offered to and accepted by the nation in the future. Although he has alluded to this restoration earlier (17:1-13; 19:28; 20:20-28), Matthew most clearly develops the idea of the kingdom's restoration to Israel in his fifth and final discourse section known as the Olivet Discourse (24–25).<sup>13</sup> Matthew's Jewish audience would have been familiar with Old Testament Scripture predicting Israel's conversion as a result of the Great Tribulation (Jer 30:7; Dan 9:24-27). The Olivet Discourse is simply an amplification of these prophecies (24:15). Matthew includes this final phase of his argument in order to give his Jewish readers hope that present Gentile prominence in the mystery age does not mean that God has forsaken His covenant promises to His chosen nation.

### **Matthew 6:9-13**

Now that the Matthew's over-all purpose and argument have been presented thereby giving us a context for the "Lord's Prayer," we are now in a position to properly analyze Matthew 6:9-13. As discussed earlier, many evangelicals believe that Christ inaugurated the kingdom in spiritual form during His First Advent. One way of showing the implausibility of this proposition is by exploring the true meaning of the so called "Lord's Prayer" found in Matthew 6:9-13. These verses say:

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 265-66.

also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil (NASB).

"The Lord's Prayer" is probably the wrong designation for these verses. Ironside explains, "Jesus Himself could not pray for it, for it includes a request for forgiveness of sins, and He was ever the Sinless One."<sup>14</sup> This prayer is more appropriately entitled "the Disciples' Prayer" since Christ was here teaching His disciples how to pray. The area of Scripture more appropriately entitled the "Lord's Prayer" is found in Christ's own high priestly prayer of John 17. The "Disciples' Prayer" is often misconstrued and misunderstood in modern evangelicalism. Many seek to organize it according to the pneumonic device "A-C-T-S." "A" stands for "adoration" as in adoration of God. "C" stands for "confession" as in personal confession of sins. "T" stands for "thanksgiving" as in thanking God for His work and provision in our lives. "S" stands for "supplication" as in asking God to supply our needs.

In actuality, this prayer is all about the kingdom.<sup>15</sup> Toussaint explains, "The sample prayer, it can be concluded, is given in the context of the coming kingdom. The first three requests are petitions for the coming of the kingdom. The last three are for the needs of the disciples in the interim preceding the establishment of the kingdom."<sup>16</sup> If Matthew 6:9-13 is in actuality a model prayer for the disciples consisting of three requests for the kingdom to come and three additional requests for their temporal needs to be met prior to the kingdom's establishment, then it becomes obvious that the Lord did not establish the kingdom at His First Advent. Otherwise, the "Disciples' Prayer" becomes nonsensical. After all, why pray for the coming of the kingdom and make additional requests until its establishment if the kingdom were already a present reality?

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Allen Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Loizeaux, 1948), 63.

<sup>15</sup> Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 107-112.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.



### *Three Requests Petitioning the Coming of the Kingdom*

Matthew 6:9-10 can best be understood as three requests that petition the Father to bring to earth the long-awaited kingdom.

#### **Hallowed be Your Name**

*First*, Matthew 6:9b says, "Hallowed be Your name." "To hallow" means to honor, respect, revere, or treat as holy or sacred. The Greek word *onoma* translated "name" refers to a specific person or an individual. Thus, Christ is here teaching His disciples to pray for the coming of the time in history when God's name will be universally revered and respected by humanity. The Old Testament, from which Matthew's Gospel draws so heavily, explains that God's name will be honored in the coming kingdom. Isaiah 29:23 says, "But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, They will sanctify *My name*; Indeed, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob And will stand in awe of the God of Israel" (italics added). According to Ezekiel 36:23, "'I will vindicate the holiness of *My great name* which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,' declares the Lord GOD, 'when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight'" (italics added). By instructing His disciples to pray for a coming age in which the Father's name would be revered, He was instructing them to pray for the kingdom to come.

#### **Your Kingdom Come**

*Second*, Matthew 6:10a says, "Your kingdom come." The fact that the word "kingdom" in this expression "Your kingdom come" is given no detailed explanation must mean that Christ is drawing upon information already revealed about the kingdom in the Old Testament. Thus, He is teaching His disciples to pray for the arrival of what

the Old Testament reveals concerning the kingdom.<sup>17</sup> The Old Testament answers both the "what" and "when" question concerning the kingdom.

The Old Testament consistently depicts the kingdom in earthly, terrestrial terms. While it would take multiple volumes to adequately portray all that the Old Testament prophets revealed concerning the coming kingdom,<sup>18</sup> a few predictions from the prophet Isaiah will suffice. According to Isaiah 2:1b-4:

Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.

Isaiah 11:6-9 similarly says:

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 65:17-25 echoes:

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<sup>17</sup> George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), 1:195.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1958; reprint, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1964), 481-90.

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem *as* a rejoicing, And her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, And joy in My people; The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, Nor the voice of crying. No more shall an infant from there *live but a few* days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner *being* one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit *them*; They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; They shall not plant and another eat; For as the days of a tree, *so shall be* the days of My people, And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, Nor bring forth children for trouble; For they *shall be* the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, And their offspring with them. It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust *shall be* the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain...

According to these wonderful predictions, when the messianic kingdom materializes, Jerusalem will be the center of world spiritual and political authority. This authority will result in perfect justice, world peace, cessation of conflict with and among the animal kingdom, economic freedom, elongated life spans, instantaneous answers to prayer, and universal, spiritual knowledge. These glorious conditions await a future Jewish generation's enthronement of the king of God's own choosing (Deut. 17:15). Such enthronement will make Israel enjoyer and possessor of all that is promised in Israel's covenants. As these covenantal blessings come upon Israel in that future day, the entire world will be blessed as well (Rom. 11:12, 15).

The Old Testament not only depicts *what* the kingdom will be like once it comes, it also explains *when* to expect its arrival. This Babylonian Captivity initiated a dark time in Jewish history known as the "Times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24; Rev. 11:2). This era is defined as the period of time when the nation no longer has a Davidic king reigning on David's Throne. During this period, Judah would be trampled down by

various Gentile powers. These powers include Babylon (605–539 B.C.), Medo-Persia (539–331 B.C.), Greece (331–63 B.C.), Rome (63 B.C.–A.D. 70), as well as the future, revived Roman Empire of the Antichrist (sometimes called "Rome Phase II").

Nebuchadnezzar, in a dream, saw this time period symbolized by a beautiful, dazzling statue. Each part of the statue represents a different Gentile power (Dan. 2). In his dream, Daniel saw the same period of time in the form of four grotesque beasts. Each beast pictured a different Gentile power (Dan. 7). To Nebuchadnezzar, who was the king of Babylon or the first Gentile power to trample down Judah, this period appeared beautiful. This perspective explains why Nebuchadnezzar perceived this era in the form of an attractive statue. To Daniel, a Jew, whose people would be trampled down by these Gentile powers, this period was dismal. This perspective explains why he saw the Times of the Gentiles as represented by various ferocious beasts.

When Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Solomonic temple and took Judah away into captivity (2 Kgs. 25; Ezek. 33:21), the earthly theocracy terminated. In other words, God governed the nation indirectly through various Davidic kings until the deposing of Zedekiah, who was the last of the Davidic dynasty to reign from David's Throne. This termination of the earthly theocracy was signified through the departure of God's *shekinah* glory from the temple (Ezek. 10:4, 18-19; 11:23).<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Times of the Gentiles, which began with Nebuchadnezzar's deposing of Zedekiah and the Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C., are marked by the following three characteristics: the termination of the earthly theocracy, the lack of a Davidic king reigning on David's Throne in Jerusalem, and Judah being trampled underfoot by a successive array of Gentile powers. The Times of the Gentiles will run their course and will eventually conclude with restoration of a rightful king reigning on David's Throne, and the return of

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<sup>19</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Kingdom of God," in *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, ed. Tim LaHaye (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2001), 1134.

the *shekinah* glory of God to the Millennial temple (Ezek. 43:1-5). This difficult period will end with the return of Jesus Christ to rule and reign from David's Throne in Jerusalem (Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45; Matt. 25:31). While the Times of the Gentiles began with Nebuchadnezzar's deposing of Zedekiah, it will be terminated at the return and enthronement of Christ thus inaugurating the long-awaited messianic kingdom.

Thus, only after the final kingdom of man (the revived Roman Empire of the Antichrist) has been terminated by Christ, will the Davidic kingdom then be established on earth (Dan. 2:34-35; 43-45; 7:23-27). This fact alone should deter interpreters from finding a premature manifestation of the kingdom in the present Church Age. Unfortunately, "kingdom now" theologians ignore this chronology by arguing for a present, spiritual form of the kingdom, despite the fact that the kingdoms of man have not yet run their course, the Antichrist and his kingdom have not yet been overthrown, and the Second Advent has not yet occurred. This Danielic chronology causes Unger to conclude:

...Daniel *neither* in the image prophecy of chapter 2 *nor* in the beast prophecy of chapter 7 *deals with the present age of the calling out of the church*, the period during which Israel is temporarily in national rejection...Daniel was given the prophetic vision of Rome up to the time of Christ's death (the two legs). The vision resumed with *the resumption of the divine dealing* with national Israel (after the completion of the church at the rapture) during the period between glorification of the church and the establishment of the Kingdom over Israel (Acts 1:6). Hence, the iron kingdom with its feet of iron and clay (cf. 3:33-35, 40, 44) and the nondescript beast of 7:7-8 envision not only Gentile power (1) as it was at the first advent, but (2) also the form in which it will exist *after the church period*, when God will resume His dealing with the *nation* Israel. How futile for conservative scholars to ignore that fact and to seek to find literal fulfillment of those prophecies in history or in the church, when those predictions refer to events yet future and have no application whatever to the church.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1981; reprint, Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 1643.

Thus, when Christ uses the word "kingdom" in Matthew 6:9, it must be understood according to this preceding rich Old Testament heritage and history, which explains not only *what* the kingdom is but *when* it will arrive. Consequently, Toussaint criticizes "...those who with Platonic concepts subjectively spiritualize the future aspect of the kingdom of God in Christ's teaching."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the kingdom here is obviously a future reality since Christ is instructing His disciples to pray for its arrival. It is absurd for someone to ask for something that he already possesses. Glasscock explains why the kingdom in the Christ's day remained a future reality:

It should be remembered that Jesus was teaching His disciples how to pray, and the petitioning for God to bring about His kingdom certainly indicates that the world in which we live is not yet under His rule. Jesus introduced the kingdom at His appearing (cf. Matthew 4:17) but was rejected by His own people who chose to have Caesar as their king (John 19:15). He was not declaring that the kingdom would come in the hearts of His servants but that it would exercise dominion over the whole earth (*ge*). Thus, even though He was the Messiah and brought the promise of the kingdom to the nation, the kingdom is still expressed in eschatological terms, "let it come," because it is not yet realized in human history since the Messiah was rejected and killed.<sup>22</sup>

### **Your Will Be Done, On Earth As It Is In Heaven**

*Third*, Matthew 6:10b says, "Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." God's rule in heaven goes unchallenged. There, His decrees are never second-guessed. Here, Christ instructs His disciples to pray that the unchallenged rule that the Father enjoys in heaven would one day become an earthly reality. In other words, Matthew 6:10b "...is an appeal for God's sovereignty to be absolutely manifested on earth."<sup>23</sup> Such

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<sup>21</sup> Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 108.

<sup>22</sup> Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 147.

<sup>23</sup> Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 110.

a request for the establishment of the sovereignty of God on earth is in essence a prayer for the earthly materializing of God's kingdom. Notice how Daniel connects this "God of heaven" with His coming kingdom: "In the days of those kings the *God of heaven* will set up a *kingdom* which will never be destroyed..." (Dan. 2:44). Matthew 6:10b is in actuality a request for the fulfillment of Daniel 2:44 where that God's heavenly sovereignty will one day become an earthly reality. In sum, the first three clauses found in the "Disciples' Prayer" (the requests for God's name to be revered, the kingdom to come, and the sovereign will of God to be done on the earth) are in reality requests for the arrival of the yet future kingdom.

### *Three Requests Related to Temporal Needs*

Previously, we observed that the first three clauses (Matt. 6:9-10) found in the "Disciples Prayer" (the requests for God's name to be revered, the kingdom to come, and the sovereign will of God to be done on the earth) are in reality requests for the yet future kingdom. Similarly, Matthew 6:11-13 can best be understood as three requests that petition the Father to meet the temporal needs of Christ's disciples in the era leading up to the kingdom's establishment while the kingdom remains in a state of postponement. Walvoord notes, "In verse 11, the petitions are changed to the first person relating to human need."<sup>24</sup>

### **Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread**

*First*, Matthew 6:11 says, "Give us this day our daily bread." Here, "bread" is most likely used as a figure of speech known as a *synecdoche* (where a part is used to represent the whole) to represent general nourishment. According to Glasscock, "'Bread' was most likely used figuratively for food in general (Gen. 3:19)."<sup>25</sup> The kingdom will be

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<sup>24</sup> John Walvoord, *Matthew* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 53.

<sup>25</sup> Glasscock, *Matthew*, 148.

a time of great agricultural prosperity resulting in no more starvation or food shortage. Amos 9:13 says, "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'When the plowman will overtake the reaper And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; When the mountains will drip sweet wine...'" Isaiah 65:21-22a similarly notes, "They will build houses and inhabit *them*; They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and another inhabit, They will not plant and another eat." Zechariah 8:12 similarly predicts, "For *there will be* peace for the seed: the vine will yield its fruit, the land will yield its produce and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these *things*."

Until this time of agricultural prosperity in the kingdom age comes, food shortages will continue to be a reality for humanity. Thus, it is appropriate for Christ to instruct His disciples to pray for their daily provision until this specific request becomes unnecessary after the kingdom comes. During the wilderness wanderings, God miraculously and physically provided for the nation of Israel through the daily provision of *manna*. This provision continued until the nation entered Canaan – the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 16:14-36; Josh. 5:11-12). At that point, daily provision of *manna* was no longer required since the prosperity of the land economically sustained the nation. Similarly, God must supply the daily needs of His disciples until every physical need is abundantly met once the agricultural prosperity of the kingdom age becomes an earthly reality. Hence, Christ instructs His disciples to pray for their daily sustenance during the kingdom's absence.

### **And Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors**

**Second**, Matthew 6:12 says, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Here, Christ instructs His disciples to seek spiritual provision when they sin and fall out of fellowship with the Father. Toussaint explains, "Judicial forgiveness is not in view (Acts 10:43) but fellowship (1 John 1:5-9). It is impossible for



one to be in fellowship with God as long as he harbors ill will in his heart."<sup>26</sup> Walvoord also explains, "The Christian already forgiven judicially should not expect restoration in the family unless he, himself, is forgiving."<sup>27</sup> Glasscock similarly notes:

It is not likely here that the issue of forgiveness is referring to initial redemptive forgiveness (for salvation) but the forgiveness for offense against the Father in the perpetual daily life situation (for fellowship). There is no salvific passage that requires the one being saved to perform any act, such as forgiving others, in order to gain forgiveness. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that salvation from eternal torment is a free gift not granted on the basis of any act (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Rom. 4:5; etc.).<sup>28</sup>

When Christ comes to establish His kingdom, His disciples will be resurrected and thus in bodies with no capacity for sin (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4-5). However, in the meantime, while still in mortal bodies, followers of Christ still retain a propensity for sin and thus can still fall out of fellowship with the Father. Consequently, they need spiritual provision to maintain or to restore fellowship with God. Therefore, Christ explains this interim spiritual provision in Matthew 6:12.

### **And Do Not Lead Us Into Temptation**

*Third*, Matthew 6:13 says, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Glasscock notes, "...and the object from which we are to seek deliverance is evil. More literally it should be understood as 'the Evil One.'...The petition of the model prayer, then, is for God to allow us to undergo the testing but to be rescued from the snare of the Evil One, the Devil."<sup>29</sup> The kingdom represents a time in history when Satan will be incarcerated (Rev. 20:2-3). With the kingdom absent in the present age, Satan remains

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<sup>26</sup> Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 111.

<sup>27</sup> Walvoord, 53.

<sup>28</sup> Glasscock, 148-49.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "...prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Thus, in the present age, with the kingdom and Satan's incarceration not a present reality, the believer is in need of protection from the Adversary (John 17:15). Such protection is what the believer must pray for during this interim age, before the kingdom comes. In sum, in Matthew 6:9-11, Christ teaches His followers to ask the Father to meet their temporal needs (physical provision, spiritual restoration, and divine protection from Satan) during the kingdom's absence. Once the kingdom comes, such requests will no longer be necessary.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, when rightly understood, the "Disciples' Prayer" consists of three requests for the kingdom to come and three additional requests for provisions that are needed while the kingdom remains in abeyance. Thus, in light of a proper understanding of the so called "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6:9-13, the whole notion that Christ already established the kingdom in spiritual form at His First Advent becomes unlikely, if not impossible.