

WHEN WILL THY KINGDOM COME? THE TIMING AND AGENCY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE LORD'S PRAYER

Introduction: “Thy Kingdom [Has/Will] Come”?

Just how *eschatological* is the Lord's Prayer (=LP; Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4), particularly in light of its second petition, “Your kingdom come” (ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου, Matt. 6:10a; Luke 11:2d)? In other words, when will God's kingdom come? Has it already arrived (not eschatological)? Is it in the process of arriving? Or will it arrive at some point in the future (eschatological)? Furthermore, who brings the kingdom about? Humans? God? Or some combination of the two? Settling the question of eschatology involves both the timing and the agency, the *when* and the *who*, of the kingdom.

When it comes to the LP, the literature is vast.¹ To get a grasp on the positions involved, Luz provides the following framework: “[t]here are essentially three basic types of interpretations in various combinations”: (a) the “dogmatic,” (b) the “ethical,” and (c)

¹ To get a grasp on the voluminous LP literature, see Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 369–415; C. Clifton Black, *The Lord's Prayer Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2018), 283–324; W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:572–75, 590–615, 620–24; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 229–33, 241–52; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 143–52; James Leslie Houlden, “Lord's Prayer,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary [ABD]* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:356–62; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1: Chapters 1–7*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 307–26; John Y.H. Yieh, “Lord's Prayer,” in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 3:690–95; idem, “Lord's Prayer,” Oxford Bibliographies Online: Biblical Studies. Cited 02 April, 2019. Online: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195393361/obo-9780195393361-0138.xml>.

the “eschatological.”² The dogmatic interpretation views the LP as a summary statement of the Christian message/faith. The ethical interpretation views the LP as a guide for Christian living. These two interpretations have often gone together in the history of the Church. However,

[t]o these by no means mutually exclusive interpretations there has been added since the history-of-religions school (c) the *eschatological* interpretation, which relates the individual petitions more or less consistently to the eschaton and interprets the Lord’s Prayer from the situation of Jesus’ eschatological proclamation without regard for its relevance.³

Without discounting the importance of “dogmatic” interpretations of the LP, the relationship between the ethical and eschatological interpretations will be the focus of this paper. At this point, it helps to notice that discussions about the LP have tended to resemble discussions about the kingdom of God more broadly.⁴

When it comes to the kingdom of God, the question of the kingdom’s timing, the

² Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 313.

³ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 313–14. According to Luz, Theodor Zahn (*Das Evangelium des Matthäus* [Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 1; Leipzig: Deichert, 1903], 268–74) interprets the first three petitions of the LP eschatologically. Albert Schweitzer (*The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* [trans. William Montgomery; New York: Holt, 1931], 239–41), Alfred F. Loisy (*Les Évangiles synoptiques* [2 vols.; Paris: Ceffonds, 1907–8], 1:603–4), and Robert Eisler (“Das letzte Abendmahl,” *ZNW* 24 [1925], 190–92) interpret the entire LP eschatologically. Luz observes that “[t]he eschatological interpretation has become the dominant interpretation today through the influence of esp. Green, Jeremias, Lohmeyer, Schürmann, Brown, and Schulz . . . as well as Davies–Allison and Gnilka.” Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 314n54.

⁴ For overviews of discussions on the kingdom of God, see Bruce Chilton, “Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 3:512–23; Dennis C. Duling, “Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven,” in *ABD* 4:49–69; R.T. France, “Kingdom of God,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 420–22; Joel B. Green, “Kingdom of God/Heaven,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 468–81.

when question, has tended to dominate recent discussions.⁵ There are three main schools of thought: (1) “already,” (2) “not yet,” and (3) “already-not-yet.”⁶ Again, note the connection between **when/timing** and **who/agency** in what follows.

First, scholars in the tradition of Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack have interpreted the second petition to mean something like “Thy kingdom has already come, let it grow among us.” Consider Ritschl’s interpretation of the second petition: “On the lips of [Jesus’] disciples, the petition that God’s dominion may come presupposes that in the full sense this dominion has already been set in motion by Christ precisely in their own circle.”⁷ This fits well with Ritschl’s definition of the kingdom of God as

the divinely ordained highest good of the community founded through God’s revelation in Christ; but it is the highest good only in the sense that it forms at the same time the ethical ideal for whose attainment the members of the community bind themselves to each other through a definite type of reciprocal action.⁸

For Ritschl and his ilk, **the kingdom of God has already arrived (when/timing)**, because it is a largely invisible ethical ideal (what), brought about by God in the inner

⁵ Green, “Kingdom of God/Heaven,” 469.

⁶ This is a common and accurate enough framework to organize the discussion. However, I admit that more nuanced frameworks are possible. For example, Black summarizes Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz’s (*The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* [trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998], 242–45) eightfold framework: the kingdom (1) de-eschatologized (Ritschl; Martin Luther); (2) of a thoroughly futurist eschatology (Weiss, Schweitzer, Allison); (3) eschatologically realized in Jesus himself (Dodd); (4) as a reality both present and future (Kümmel, Jeremias); (5) existentialized (Bultmann, Fuchs, Käsemann, Weder); (6) symbolized (Norman Perrin, Boring, Keck); (7) unmasked (Gager); and (8) the non-eschatological kingdom (Crossan, Borg). See Black, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 117–18.

⁷ Ritschl, “Instruction in the Christian Religion,” in *Three Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 256.

⁸ Ritschl, 222.

lives of **human individuals as they participate in his ethical agenda (who/agency, how, and where)**, in order to reveal God’s love and the value of humans in their relationships with one another (why).⁹ I will refer to this interpretation as the “already,” “ethical,” or “non-eschatological” view.

Second, and in reaction to the “already” view, scholars in the tradition of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer have interpreted the second petition to mean something like “Thy kingdom has not yet come, let it arrive soon.”¹⁰ For example, in his 1892 argument for the future, apocalyptic, and eschatological nature of the kingdom of God, Weiss himself argued that “[w]hat speaks more forcefully than all else” against an identification of the kingdom of God as already realized in Jesus’ disciples is “the fact that Jesus put in the mouths of his disciples . . . the words ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου.”

Let us be careful lest somehow or other we play down this fact and these words. The meaning is not “may thy Kingdom grow,” “may thy Kingdom be perfected,” but rather, “may thy Kingdom come.” For the disciples, the βασιλεία is not yet here, not even in its beginnings; therefore Jesus bids them: ζητεῖτε τὴν βασιλείαν (Luke 12:31). . . . We would import an opaque and confusing element into this unified and clearly unambiguous religious frame of mind were we to think somehow of a “coming in an ever higher degree” or of a growth or increase of the Kingdom. Just as there can be no different stages of its being . . . so likewise there are no stages of its coming. Either the βασιλεία is here, or it is not yet here. For the disciples and for the early church it is not yet here.¹¹

For Weiss and company, **the kingdom has not yet arrived (when/timing)**, because it is

⁹ Nicholas Perrin provides this six-question framework (what, who, when, where, why, how) for analyzing the kingdom of God. *The Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology*, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 28–36.

¹⁰ For a summary of modern kingdom of God research along these lines, as an eschatological reaction to a non-eschatological interpretation, see Green, “Kingdom of God/Heaven,” 469; Perrin, *The Kingdom of God*, 28–33.

¹¹ Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 73–74.

the visible apocalyptic and eschatological reign of God upon the earth (what and where), which will bring this age to a close (why). **Only God can bring it about, and the best humans can do is to prepare themselves for its arrival (who/agency and how).** I will refer to this as the “not yet” or “eschatological view.”¹²

Third, scholars in the tradition of Joachim Jeremias, Werner Kümmel, George Ladd, and George Beasley-Murray have argued for some combination of present and future, non-eschatological and eschatological.¹³ Although the precise way in which the combination is achieved varies from scholar to scholar, an interpretation of the second petition along these lines yields the paraphrase: “Thy kingdom has already begun to arrive, let it arrive soon in its fullness.” These kinds of views are sometimes labeled “inaugurated eschatology,” as opposed to a “realized” eschatology (the “already” view) or a “futurist” eschatology (the “not yet” view). In addition to using this terminology, I will refer to this as the “already-not-yet” interpretation.

So, which is it? When Christians today pray “Your kingdom come” in the LP, does that mean that the kingdom is already here, that it is not yet here, or some combination of the two? Furthermore, do humans bring the kingdom about, does God, or

¹² Of course, for Weiss and many of his theological descendants, this describes Jesus’ mistaken view of the kingdom of God. Jesus expected the kingdom to arrive either during his lifetime or very soon after his death, but, Weiss and others would argue, he was obviously wrong. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that an eschatological interpretation of the LP does not necessarily entail the view that Jesus was mistaken about the future nature of the kingdom.

¹³ Green, “Kingdom of God/Heaven,” 469. See George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke (3rd ed.; London: SCM, 1972); Werner G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus*, trans. D.M. Barton (2nd ed.; SBT 23; London: SCM, 1961); George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

some combination of the two? Again, note the connection between the *when* and the *who*, the timing and the agency, of the kingdom. Broadly speaking, to the extent that the kingdom has *already* arrived, *humans* participate in bringing about the kingdom. However, to the extent that the kingdom has *not yet* arrived, *God* brings about the kingdom.

It has become common either to argue that the LP is entirely eschatological, or that the first half of the prayer is more eschatological, while the second half is more ethical, focused on disciples' daily needs.¹⁴ In this paper, I argue that, especially due to the noncompetitive view of divine and human agency in the first, third, and fifth petitions, the "already-not-yet" view does the best job of explaining the entire LP, with elements of the "already" and the "not yet" throughout the prayer.¹⁵ According to the LP, the kingdom of God, I argue, is eschatological, but not otherworldly. It has ethical

¹⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 227. For eschatological arguments, see Raymond Edward Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 175–208; David H. Milling, "The Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer in Terms of Future Eschatology," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 3 (1969): 13–25; Paul Trudinger, "The 'Our Father' in Matthew as Apocalyptic Eschatology," *The Downside Review* 107, no. 366 (1989): 49–54. For a critique of the eschatological interpretation, see Jeffrey B. Gibson, "Matthew 6:9–13//Luke 11:2–4: An Eschatological Prayer?," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 31 (2001): 96–105.

¹⁵ The question of the precise relationship between the two versions of the LP in the Gospels (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4) has long occupied biblical scholars. For a sense of the debate, see Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 370–86; Black, *The Lord's Prayer*, 43–49; Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 309–11. Without discounting the importance of this question, I will focus on the Matthean version of the LP in this paper, mainly because Matthew's version is closer to the versions commonly prayed by Christians today. Nevertheless, Luke's version of the LP, read within the context of Luke's Gospel, also seems to support (1) a noncompetitive view of divine and human agency and, therefore, (2) the "already-not-yet" view of the kingdom of God. I will comment upon Luke's version as necessary.

implications, but it is not thereby a non-eschatological ethical ideal. By “noncompetitive agency,” I mean that *both* God *and* God’s people hallow God’s name, do God’s will, forgive debts, and, I argue, bring about God’s kingdom—even as God is given the clear priority in each of those actions.¹⁶ In order to support this argument, I will make a cumulative case by working through the LP petition by petition, critically examining arguments for the “already” and “not yet” interpretations.

Preliminary Considerations

However, before discussing the content of the LP in detail, I would like to briefly argue that the “already-not-yet” interpretation of the kingdom of God makes the best sense of (1) the “kingdom of God” content in the Gospels, (2) the content and context of the two versions of the LP (Matt. 6; Luke 11), and (3) the unity of the LP.

The Kingdom of God in the Gospels

First, the “already-not-yet” position makes the best sense of the kingdom of God content in the Gospels. Due to the LP’s brevity, everyone has to appeal to evidence about the kingdom of God in the Gospels more generally. Although this paper is not the place for a comprehensive examination of the kingdom of God in the Gospels, I believe that an “already-not-yet” reading of the LP is supported but the fact that there are passages in the

¹⁶ I am merely trying to argue that, when it comes to these actions, the question of agency is not a zero-sum game. Just because God hallows his name, brings his kingdom, does his will, and forgives debts, that does not mean that human beings do not do so as well. This is therefore much less ambitious than the account of “non-competitive relations” between Creator and creatures in Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), although I think that Tanner is on the right track.

Gospels that seem to indicate that the kingdom is (1) present/already here, (2) imminent/coming, and (3) future/not yet here.¹⁷

Given this mixed bag of evidence regarding the kingdom's timing, both the "already" and the "not yet" perspectives have to find some way to either ignore or reinterpret the passages used by the other side. Consider how Harnack ignored Jesus' eschatological pronouncements by relegating them to his Jewish context, rather than his unique contributions to history. Responding to those who would claim that Jesus' apocalyptic/eschatological pronouncements were primary and his ethical ones were secondary, Harnack wrote:

In this view I cannot concur. It is considered a perverse procedure in similar cases to judge eminent, epoch-making personalities first and foremost by what they share with their contemporaries, and on the other hand to put what is great and characteristic in them into the background. . . . There can be no doubt about the fact that the idea of the two kingdoms, of God and of the devil, and their conflicts, and of that last conflict at some future time when the devil, long since cast out of heaven, will be also defeated on earth, was an idea which Jesus simply shared with his contemporaries. He did not start it, but he grew up in it and he retained it. The other view, however, that the kingdom of God 'cometh not with observation,' that it is already here, was his own.¹⁸

On the other hand, Weiss claimed that, if Jesus had contradicted his contemporaries' eschatological conceptions of the kingdom, he would have done so (and the evangelists would have highlighted it) much more explicitly.¹⁹ Furthermore, he argued that the

¹⁷ For an overview, see Black, *The Lord's Prayer*, 117–28; Perrin, *The Kingdom of God*, 152–212; N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 467–72.

¹⁸ Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity? Sixteen Lectures Delivered in the University of Berlin during the Winter-Term 1899–1900* (trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders, Theological Translation Library; London: Williams and Norgate; G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901), 53–54.

¹⁹ Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom*, 67–69.

parables that seem to indicate that the kingdom is present (such as the parables of the seed growing secretly, tares, mustard seed, and leaven) are really about something else, such as “the fate of the proclaimed word.”²⁰

In contrast to both of these approaches, the “already-not-yet” reading does the best job of making sense of the entire body of evidence we have regarding the kingdom of God in the Gospels.²¹

The Content and Contexts of the Two Versions of the LP

Second, the “already-not-yet” position helps to make good sense of the content and contexts of the two versions of the LP (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4), without having to play them against each other. It is intriguing to note the similarities in the differences between the Beatitudes and the LP in Matthew and Luke. Both sets of differences can be interpreted as Luke mitigating Matthew’s eschatological focus with his own emphasis on the ethical. As Houlden observes, the content of Luke’s LP

is probably best seen, as far as Luke's intention goes, as diverging from Matthew in the more practical and ethical way in which it sees the life of the kingdom. In this, too, as in its pithiness, it is parallel to his treatment of the Beatitudes (6:20-22). Line 5 in particular seems to substitute a concern with daily bread for Matthew's hope for the "bread of the kingdom". . . ; just as his blessing (6:21) is for those who "hunger now" rather than Matthew's "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6) and for the poor (6:21) rather than the "poor in spirit" (Matt 5:3). We recall, too, the strongly realistic picture of the new order Jesus brings depicted in the Nazareth sermon in Luke 4:16-20. It is possible that in line 7 Luke edges the sense of "temptation" toward a notion of everyday testing of faith in various moral predicaments and away from the ultimate (eschatological) test that

²⁰ Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom*, 72.

²¹ Here I agree with N.T. Wright’s assessment that both the “already” and the “not yet” are “strongly present through the various strands of gospel tradition, and to excise one of them because we deem them incompatible is anachronistic criticism of the worst sort. Better by far to hold them together, and to discover the framework of belief and intention within which both make sense.” *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 467.

will precede the End and that Matthew presumably has in mind.²²

And yet, even if it is legitimate to see Matthew's LP as placing slightly more emphasis on the "not yet" than Luke's LP, it is equally important to note the contexts of the two versions, which, I suggest, seem to push in the opposite directions. That is, while Matthew's LP perhaps emphasizes the "not yet," its placement in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount should militate against a strong divide between eschatology and ethics. And, while Luke's LP perhaps emphasizes the "already," its introduction as a distinctive communal prayer of Jesus' disciples (*vis-a-vis* John's, see Luke 11:1) should militate against a collapsing of the LP into an ethical ideal for individuals.²³

Whereas a thoroughgoing "already" reading would have to find some way to account for the eschatological emphases in the content of Matthew's LP and the context of Luke's, and thoroughgoing "not yet" reading would have to find some way to account for the ethical emphases in the content of Luke's LP and the context of Matthew's, an "already-not-yet" reading is able to allow both the content and the contexts of the two versions of the LP to stand in helpful tension.

The Unity of the LP

Third, an "already-not-yet" reading makes the best sense of the unity of the LP. In both Matthew and Luke, there is a clear twofold structure, delineated by the shift from the second-person singular (Matt. 6:9–10; Luke 11:2) to the first-person plural (Matt.

²² J.L. Houlden, "Lord's Prayer," *ABD* 4:360.

²³ Furthermore, as Gibson argues, the context of the LP in *both* Matthew and Luke suggests a focus on the disciples avoiding the apostasy of "this generation." "An Eschatological Prayer?," 99.

6:11–13; Luke 11:3–4). At first glance, there appears to be a shift from the eschatological to the ethical, from God and the coming of his kingdom to the daily needs of God’s people. However, I will argue below that this oversimplifies things and that there is an interweaving of the “already” and the “not yet” throughout the prayer. I therefore believe that an “already-not-yet” reading of the prayer does the best job of securing the unity of the LP.²⁴

Our Father in heaven (Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς; Matt. 6:9b; par. Luke 11:2b)

When it comes to the opening words of the LP, there has been a longstanding debate on just how innovative and unique Jesus’ address of God as “father” (Πάτερ) was. Jeremias argued for the underlying Aramaic *abba*, claiming that Jesus’ address of God as such was entirely unique in his context, transcending a Jewish view of God with one of childlike intimacy.²⁵ As can be seen in Harnack’s well-known emphasis of “the fatherhood of God” as one of the pillars of Jesus’ kingdom proclamation, a non-eschatological reading of the LP emphasizes the distinctiveness of addressing God in

²⁴ This is *contra* Milling, who claims that only an eschatological reading of the entire LP secures the unity of the prayer. He characterizes other, non-eschatological readings as “sacrific[ing] the unity of the Prayer, in an attempt to make a few individual clauses relevant and practical” (“The Interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer in Terms of Future Eschatology,” 13). But I think this is an example of the pot calling the kettle black. Both the “already” and the “not yet” readings have to work hard to explain (away) at least a few lines of the LP in order to arrive at either a thoroughgoing ethical or eschatological interpretation. The “already-not-yet” position, however, is able to allow both elements of the LP to stand in unity-in-tension.

²⁵ See Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1971), 36–37, 61–68; idem, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 11–65, 95–98; idem, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965), 9–30; idem, *The Lord’s Prayer* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 17–21.

such intimate terms.²⁶ At first glance, then, the “already” reading seems to win out.

However, Jeremias’ arguments about *abba*/father have come under criticism in subsequent decades.²⁷ It is now recognized that, although Jesus’ use of the Aramaic *abba* was perhaps distinctive, referring to God as father was not.²⁸ Rather than overplaying the uniqueness of Jesus vis-a-vis his Jewish context, it seems far better to note the profound connections between “our father” and the narrative of the Hebrew Bible.²⁹ I agree with Perrin, who argues (based on, among other passages, Jeremiah 3:18–19 and Exodus 4:22–23) that the language of God as father recalls the covenantal relationship between God and his people—a relationship that spans from Abraham to Moses through exodus, from David to Jesus through exile, and from Jesus to his followers through new exodus and return from exile.³⁰ The covenantal resonances would also seem to suggest the

²⁶ See Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 63–70.

²⁷ Houlden, “Lord’s Prayer,” *ABD* 4:360; see Géza Vermès, *Jesus the Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 210; James Barr, “‘Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy,’” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 39:1 (1988): 28–47.

²⁸ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 245n56; Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 314–16.

²⁹ The editors of NA28 note connections between Matt. 6:9 and Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Wisd. 2:16; Sir. 23:1,4; Jub. 1:24f.

³⁰ Perrin, *The Kingdom of God*, 224–26. Perrin also argues that, “in encouraging his disciples to call on God as ‘Father,’ Jesus is implying the restoration of the Adamic image.” Perrin previously argues that “[t]he homology shared by Adam and the creator God inevitably implies some kind of filial relationship (sonship), as becomes clear when Adam has a son ‘in his own likeness’ (Gen 5:3)” (43). However, I am more hesitant to make this connection, because I think there is a difference, revealed in the use of Hebrew prepositions, between Adam being created “in our *image*, according to our *likeness*” (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ; Gen. 1:26) and Seth being “in [Adam’s] *likeness*, according to his *image*” (בְּדְמוּתוֹ כְּצַלְמֹו; Gen. 5:3). See David J.A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53–103, at 78.

importance of covenantal faithfulness on the part of those praying “our father,” and not just on God’s part alone.

Furthermore, the combination of Matthew’s “our father” with Luke’s introduction of the LP vis-a-vis John’s disciples (Luke 11:1) suggests a distinctive communal emphasis here. As mentioned above, this emphasis seems to militate against the “already” position’s tendency to collapse the kingdom of God into an ethical ideal for individuals. Nevertheless, I will argue below that this communal emphasis should shape our understanding of both God and his people hallowing God’s name and doing God’s will.

Finally, although the phrase “in heaven” (ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς) surely *at least* distinguishes between God and earthly fathers (see Matt. 23:9), the difference is already so sufficiently obvious that it most likely is doing more.³¹ At the very least, “in heaven” (6:9b), along with “on earth as in heaven” (ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς; 6:10c) does suggest a dualistic emphasis on otherworldly realms common in apocalyptic eschatology.³²

On balance, then, “our father in heaven,” despite an ethical reading’s emphasis on the fatherhood of God, seems to support the eschatological reading. Indeed, theologically-speaking, it is hard to imagine a petitionary prayer that does not have at least an eschatological component, given that a request is being made to God, presumably regarding something that is not already the case! However, the covenantal resonances in “our father” at least open to the door to a non-competitive account of divine and human

³¹ Lohmeyer and Perrin suggest that there is an implied critique of the temple here, God having withdrawn his presence from Jerusalem. Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord’s Prayer* (London: Collins, 1965), 60–61; Perrin, *The Kingdom of God*, 227.

³² B.J. Pitre, “Apocalypticism and Apocalyptic Teaching,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 23–33, at 26.

agency in which covenantal faithfulness is the main concern.

Your Kingdom Come (Matt. 6:9c–10; par. Luke 11:2c–d)

A core of my argument is that the petitions in the first half of the LP are mutually interpreting. That is, for both Matthew and Luke, for God’s kingdom to come means that his name is hallowed—by both God and God’s people. And, for Matthew, it means that God’s name is hallowed and his will is done on earth—by both God and God’s people—as both of those things are already done in heaven. The grammatical structure of the petitions seems to at least allow for—if not support—this reading. After all, the subject of the verbs *ἁγιασθήτω*, *ἐλθέτω* and *γενηθήτω* is not God (though he is being addressed), but rather God’s name, kingdom, and will.

Therefore, although “your kingdom come,” if read on its own, *might* be clearly eschatological, as interpreted by the other two positions, it is best read as an “already-not-yet” request involving both divine and human agency coming together in a noncompetitive way. It is not an either/or but a both/and. God’s name is hallowed and his will is done by both God and his people. Therefore, this noncompetitive agency should, I argue, extend to the second petition as well. God brings the kingdom, but his people participate in this process.

Hallowed be your name (*ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου*; Matt. 6:9c; par. Luke 11:2c)

God’s “name” refers to his reputation, essence, and identity. It is already holy (Lev. 20:3; Ps. 30:4; Isa. 57:15; Ezek. 20:39; Amos 2:7). So *ἁγιάζω* here means not “to

make holy,” but rather “to treat or reverence as holy,” distinct and set apart.³³ But who treats God’s name as holy? God or God’s people? The aorist passive imperative ἁγιασθήτω at first suggests a punctiliar divine passive—God hallowing his own name at single future point in time. However, the regular use of aorist imperatives in prayers complicates the decision about timing.³⁴ Furthermore, regarding divine vs. human agency, there is OT evidence that points in both directions.³⁵ As Nolland observes, “An eschatological orientation would connect with the thought of Ez. 36:23: ‘I [God] will sanctify my great name’. There the sanctification in view is exclusively an act of God.”³⁶ However, a non-eschatological reading can appeal to Isaiah 29:23, where Israel sanctifies God’s name, “and where, though God is clearly involved, it is people who are to honour God’s name in action and in praise.”³⁷ Furthermore, as Luz notes, in Judaism “[h]allowing the name’ is a widespread expression that means obedience to God’s commandments. . . . For Jews its highest expression is martyrdom.”³⁸

³³ See BDAG, 9–10.

³⁴ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 389; Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 316; cf. BDF §337 (4).

³⁵ Luz lists Lev. 10:3; Ezek. 36:22–23; 38:23; and 39:7 as texts where God hallows his own name, and Exod. 20:7; Lev. 22:32; and Isa. 29:23 as texts where humans hallow God’s name. *Matthew 1–7*, 317.

³⁶ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 286.

³⁷ Nolland, *Matthew*, 286–87. Nolland also cites similarities between the LP and the Jewish Qaddish/Kaddish prayer as evidence in favor of a non-eschatological reading. However, I am not so sure that the Qaddish’s “May he establish his kingdom in your lifetime” is non-eschatological. Much like the petition of the LP in question here, it appears ambiguous.

³⁸ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 317.

Due to the brevity of the petition and the evidence available for both positions, a decision is difficult.³⁹ However, I do not believe we have to make a choice.⁴⁰ Rather, I interpret this petition as an “already-not-yet” request that both God and God’s people (including the one praying the prayer) would sanctify God’s name—God, by bringing his people back from exile, and God’s people, by doing God’s will in obedience to God’s commands.⁴¹

Your kingdom come (ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου; Matt. 6:10a; par. Luke 11:2d)

Here I agree with Luz’s assessment that “[w]ith the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer . . . the eschatological interpretation of the prayer has its strongest pillar.”⁴² On a purely grammatical level, it is hard to refute Weiss’ claim that, if the disciples of Jesus are told to pray that the kingdom would come, that means that the kingdom is not yet here.⁴³

However, this is only the case if the second petition is interpreted on its own. We cannot ignore all the evidence in the Gospels that portrays the kingdom as having, in some sense, already arrived. Furthermore, as I am arguing, the first and the third petitions

³⁹ Luz considers OT and other Jewish parallels before arriving at an “open interpretation” of the petition. *Matthew 1–7*, 317–18; cf. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 389–90.

⁴⁰ I agree with Luz’s assessment that “[o]nly for an exclusively eschatological interpretation of the petition are there no arguments.” *Matthew 1–7*, 318.

⁴¹ As Perrin notes, the context of Ezek. 36 and Isa. 29 seems to demand such a “return from exile” interpretation. However, although he does briefly note that Ezek. 36 speaks of the people’s renewed obedience to the covenant, I think that the connection between divine and human agency in this petition of the LP deserves more emphasis than he gives it. See *The Kingdom of God*, 228–29.

⁴² Luz, 318.

⁴³ Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, 73–74.

help to interpret the second. Therefore, although the future, final arrival of God's kingdom is primarily in view here (otherwise we would not be praying for its coming), human participation in the hallowing of God's name and the doing of God's will in the present means that they are, in some sense, bringing about the kingdom's arrival already, even if God is surely given priority in agency.

Your will be done (γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου; Matt. 6:10b)

Regardless of one's stance on the precise historical relationship between Matthew's and Luke's versions of the LP, I argue that, on the basis of accepting Matthew as canonical Scripture, Christian interpreters ought not ignore the third petition when interpreting the second. I agree with C. Clifton Black, who argues that, "[w]hile it is conceptually possible to separate petitions for the coming kingdom (Luke 11:2c = Matt. 6:10a) and the fulfillment of God's will (Matt. 6:10b), that is theologically ill-advised," because there is considerable conceptual overlap between kingdom and God's will.⁴⁴ Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21 are important in this connection: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." After all, a kingdom is the realm in which the will of the king is carried out.⁴⁵

But, much like with the first petition, the question arises: who does God's will? God? Or God's people? An eschatological interpretation of this petition claims the former, and a non-eschatological the latter. The answer, again, is surely both. I agree with

⁴⁴ Black, *The Lord's Prayer*, 105.

⁴⁵ Regarding the will of the Father in Matthew, see also 12:50; 18:14; 21:31; and 26:42.

Luz that Matthew 6:33 (ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ θεοῦ] καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ) “offers a clue to Matthew’s understanding [of the third petition] in that the evangelist adds ‘righteousness’ to ‘God’s kingdom,’ much in the same way he puts the third petition alongside the second. Strive for the kingdom by doing the righteousness appropriate to it.”⁴⁶ We are also aided by Jesus’ verbatim repetition of γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου in 26:42. There, the sense of the prayer is that both Jesus and the Father might accomplish the Father’s will. Jesus is surely not praying that the Father would do whatever he wants to, without any corresponding implications for Jesus’ own actions. Here, I argue, the same noncompetitive relationship between divine and human agency is in view. The prayer is that both God himself and the person praying the prayer (and, most likely, other human beings as well) would accomplish God’s will.

On earth as it is in heaven (ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς; Matt. 6:10c)

As mentioned above, both “in heaven” (6:9b) and “on earth as it is in heaven” (6:10c) perhaps suggest the kind of dualistic/otherworldly thinking found in apocalyptic eschatology. However, just as I have argued that the first three petitions of the LP are mutually interpreting, I also argue that this clause should be taken to apply to all three petitions, and not merely to the third. It is perhaps better to translate the clause more literally than the NRSV: “as in heaven, [so] also on earth.”⁴⁷ The clause seems to imply that God’s will is already done in heaven, and at least not yet fully done on earth. Given the conceptual overlap between (1) the hallowing of God’s name, (2) God’s

⁴⁶ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 319.

⁴⁷ See France, *Matthew*, 230; Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 309, 319; BDF §453 (1).

kingdom/rule, and (3) the doing of God's will, I argue that God's name is hallowed and his kingdom/rule is already present and recognized in heaven, and at least not yet fully so on earth. This is the "not yet" aspect of both the clause in question and the first half of the LP. However, because humans participate in the hallowing of God's name and the doing of God's will on earth, there is also an "already" aspect to both this clause and the entire first half of the LP.

**Give us this day our daily bread (τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον;
Matt. 6:11; par. Luke 11:3)**

So far, I have argued, against those who claim that either the entire LP or its first half are eschatological, that an "already-not-yet" perspective makes better sense of the first half of the prayer, especially given the noncompetitive relationship between human and divine agency that seems to be in view in the first, third, and (I argue) second petitions. That is, I have been pushing back against the apparent upper hand of the "not yet" position in the first half of the LP.

As we turn to the second half of the LP, however, the "already" position seems to have the upper hand. After all, what could be more mundane and quotidian than the request for daily bread? However, the fourth petition is not nearly as straightforward as its traditional English translation implies. The contested etymology and meaning of ἐπιούσιον has bearing on whether the bread petition of the LP is eschatological or not. Traditionally, the word has been translated as "daily," which supports a non-eschatological interpretation. However, the word is so rare in Greek that interpreters since

Origen have long suspected it is a neologism.⁴⁸

Depending on its etymology, ἐπιούσιον could mean (1) “necessary for existence,” (2) “for the current day, for today,” (3) “for the following day,” or (4) “coming,” in the sense of (a) “future,” (b) “coming/belonging to today,” (c) “next,” (d) “coming upon (us, from the Father),” or (e) “pertaining to the coming kingdom.”⁴⁹ A non-eschatological reading could rely on (1), (2), (3), (4b), (4c), or (4d). An eschatological reading could rely on (3), (4a), (4e), or a spiritualized interpretation of (1). Interpretation (3) seems to have the best lexical support, but this does not settle the eschatological question.⁵⁰ “Give us this day our bread for the following day” could be “already,” referring to literal bread/sustenance for the immediate future, or “not yet,” referring to the coming messianic banquet.

On the one hand, even the staunchest advocates for the “not yet” interpretation of the fourth petition have to admit that literal, present bread is still in view. Consider Hagner, who, despite glossing the bread petition as “give to us today the eschatological bread that will be ours in the future,” admits that “[t]he prayer *is* nevertheless a prayer for bread. And there is a sense in which the bread (by synecdoche, ‘food’) we partake of daily is an anticipation of the eschatological banquet.”⁵¹ On the other hand, given (1) the allusion here to the provision of manna in Exodus 16, (2) Jewish expectations of the

⁴⁸ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 319n95; cf. Origen, *De Orat.* 27.7.

⁴⁹ From BDAG, 376–77.

⁵⁰ For an examination of the possible Semitic background, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:607–10. For an examination of the Greek evidence, see Colin J. Hemer, “Epiousios,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 7:22 (1984): 81–94.

⁵¹ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 149–50.

return of manna in the final redemption,⁵² and (3) the connections in the Gospels (esp. Luke) between Jesus' table fellowship, the Last Supper, and the messianic banquet to come, the eschatological edge to this petition, even if indirect, should not be forgotten.⁵³ On balance, the evidence seems to favor an "already-not-yet" interpretation.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (καὶ ἄφεξ ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν; Matt. 6:12; par. Luke 11:4a)

Yet again, the question of agency arises. Who forgives debts/sins?⁵⁴ God or God's people? However, whereas the first and third petitions were ambiguous, the fifth position is clear: both God and God's people forgive. Without getting into the interesting questions about whether this petition implies that divine forgiveness is a *quid pro quo* for human forgiveness,⁵⁵ I would merely like to note that the *reciprocity* of the forgiveness petition implies a noncompetitive view of divine and human agency. This noncompetitive agency—at least when it comes to the hallowing of God's name, the doing of God's will, and the forgiveness of debts—supports an "already-not-yet" interpretation of the LP and

⁵² See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:609 for the citations.

⁵³ Perrin cites connections with Exod. 16, 24, and Luke 14:12–15. *Kingdom of God*, 215–17. Gibson argues for a connection between the "Massah" tradition (Exod. 17:1–7; Num. 14; Deut. 6–8; Pss. 78, 95, 106; 1 Cor. 10) and the entire LP, particularly the bread petition. The focus would then be on avoiding the unfaithfulness of the wilderness generation. "An Eschatological Prayer?," 101–102.

⁵⁴ Monetary debts might be in view, but personal sins/offences seem to be primary. After all, we don't owe God money. France, *Matthew*, 249–50; cf. Matt 6:14–15; 18:21–35; Luke 11:4.

⁵⁵ It does not. See Matt. 18:21–35 for a similarly reciprocal depiction of forgiveness that emphasizes God's merciful initiative.

the kingdom of God. Although it does not settle the question of timing, it militates against the “not yet” view that, because we still await the final arrival of God’s kingdom, only God (and not human beings) participate in such an arrival. And, regarding the fifth petition specifically, the emphasis on the need for divine forgiveness of debts militates against the “already” view that the kingdom of God is an ethical ideal and the only salvation that is required is *epistemological*, the recognition that God is closer to us than we had previously thought.

And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one (καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ; Matt. 6:13; par. Luke 11:4b)

I argued above that the LP begins on an eschatological note with “our Father in heaven.” Does it end on an eschatological note as well? The answer depends upon just what πειρασμόν and τοῦ πονηροῦ mean. Although *peirasmos* has traditionally been translated as “temptation” (which in English connotes a temptation to sin or do wrong), the word in Greek can also mean testing or trial. The first thing that comes to mind is the *peirasmos* of Jesus himself in the wilderness, where perhaps both senses of the word are in play (Matt. 4:1–11). However, the question remains whether μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν has a specific, final temptation/trial in view (the “not yet” reading), or the many temptations/trials faced by disciples on a daily basis (the “already” reading).

While it is possible that, as Perrin argues, μὴ plus the aorist imperative εἰσενέγκῃς implies a specific πειρασμόν, even though it lacks the article, the common use of the aorist imperative in prayers (mentioned above with regard to ἀγιασθήτω in 6:9c) should

perhaps prevent us from drawing strong conclusions here.⁵⁶ Furthermore, even if a specific *πειρασμόν* is in view, it is debatable whether or not this term had a technical apocalyptic/eschatological meaning.⁵⁷

When the phrase *εἰς πειρασμόν* occurs elsewhere in the Gospels, it is in Jesus' injunction(s) in the Gethsemane to his disciples to stay awake and pray that they would not enter *εἰς πειρασμόν* (Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 22:40; 22:46). There, as here in the LP, the prayer seems to be for faithful perseverance in spite of temptation/trial, and not just for the complete absence of temptation/trial. Although Perrin is right to note the eschatological dimensions of the cosmic battle taking place at this point in the Gospel narratives, I think that France is also right to note that the immediate danger/testing was also in view, and not merely a final trial.⁵⁸ An "already-not-yet" interpretation of the LP allows for an inaugurated eschatological perspective in which disciples encounter temptations/trials now that are foretastes/echoes of the final *peirasmos* to come.

As for the debate about whether *τοῦ πονηροῦ* refers to "evil" in general (neuter) or to "the evil one" (masculine), the evidence seems to slightly favor the latter interpretation. As France notes, Matthew's use of the same term in 13:19 and 13:38 seems to clearly have "the evil one" in view. And the connection between *πειρασμόν*, and *τοῦ*

⁵⁶ Perrin, *The Kingdom of God*, 220.

⁵⁷ France (*Matthew*, 252) and Luz (*Matthew 1–7*, 322) both argue that *peirasmos* did not have such a meaning, although Luz admits Rev. 3:10 ("Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial [τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ] that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth") as an exception. It seems like an important exception(!), though not definitive. As Hagner (*Matthew 1–13*, 151) notes, *peirasmos* has the definite article in Rev. 3:10.

⁵⁸ See Perrin, *The Kingdom of God*, 220–23; France, *Matthew*, 252.

πονηροῦ here seems to recall the temptation narrative in Matthew 4:1–11, where the devil is referred to as ὁ πειράζων (4:3).⁵⁹ Therefore, it seems legitimate to equate τοῦ πονηροῦ with “the devil” with “the tempter.”

There is, therefore, a clearly eschatological aspect to both the LP’s opening address and its final petitions. However, once again, an “already-not-yet” inaugurated eschatological interpretation, and not a futurist one, makes the best sense of the LP’s ending.

Conclusion: The LP’s Answers to the “Kingdom Questions”

While it has become common either to argue that the LP is entirely eschatological, or that the first half of the prayer is more eschatological and the second half is more ethical, I have argued that the “already-not-yet” view does the best job of explaining the entire LP, with elements of the “already” and the “not yet” throughout the prayer.

While “Our father in heaven” is, I admit, predominantly eschatological, it recalls the covenantal relationship—and the expectation of covenantal faithfulness—between God and God’s people. The first three petitions (“hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done”) are a mixture of the “already” and the “not yet.” Because both God and humans hallow God’s name and do God’s will, I argue that they both bring about the kingdom’s arrival in the present, even if God is surely given the priority in agency and the full arrival of the kingdom is still future. The fifth petition (“forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”) makes the reciprocal, noncompetitive relationship explicit. Yet it also militates against collapsing the kingdom of God into a

⁵⁹ France, *Matthew*, 231n14, 251.

mere ethical ideal. The fourth (“give us this day our ἐπιούσιον bread”) and final petitions (“do not bring us to πειρασμόν, but rescue us from τοῦ πονηροῦ”) are also a mixture of the “already” and the “not yet,” although they clearly acknowledge that human beings need divine provision and protection in order to cooperate with God in the doing of his will.

Both God and God’s people hallow God’s name, do God’s will, forgive debts, and bring about God’s kingdom—even as God is given the clear priority in each of those actions. Put simply, God initiates the kingdom, but his people participate in it. To the degree that we lose sight of the fact that God, not humans, is the primary agent of the kingdom, we forget that it is *God’s* kingdom we are praying about in the second petition and the LP. However, to the extent that we ignore how we are called to participate in the kingdom even as we pray for its full arrival, we forget that it is God’s *kingdom*—and every kingdom has its subjects. According to the LP, the kingdom of God is eschatological, but not otherworldly. It has ethical implications, but it is not a non-eschatological ethical ideal.