

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Matthew 6:9-13

Verses 9,10

Therefore, pray like this.

Our Father in heaven.

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All the verbs are imperative, third person singulars. The old-fashioned way of translating this would employ the "let" form, e.g., let your name be kept holy.

Our Father in heaven. Jesus taught his disciples to call on God and address him as Father (1P1:17). This is the gospel. The expression arose from Jesus' own prayers and way of speaking about God. It began at a young age (Lk 2:49). There are 21 instances of Jesus referred to God as his Father in Matthew. A selection is:

10:32 I will acknowledge him before my Father...

11:25 I praise you Father...

16:17 Revealed to you by my Father in heaven.

16:27 Son shall come in the glory of his Father

26:29 When I drink it new...in my Father's kingdom

26:42 Father, let this cup pass from me

28:19 Baptising them in the name of the Father...

Clearly, these passages describe the relationship of Jesus to the Father, that he is his Son, equal to him in as God. In the Old Testament, God was likened to a father and Israel likened to a son through the choosing of the Hebrews from the nations and establishing a covenant with them (Isa 63:16,17; 64:8,9; Jer 31:20). These are analogies and metaphors and are rare in the OT.

Our Father πᾶτερ ἡμῶν is the more formal expression as opposed to Abba, the Aramaic used once by Jesus (Mk 14:6) and used by Paul to describe the Spirit's role in the inner yearning and supplication by Christians in prayer (Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6). Christ deliberately transfers his relationship with his Father to his disciples so that they can use the personal possessive pronoun **our** and address him in the familiar, intimate and family term, **Father**. Later, this right was given in the sacrament of baptism (28:19) and understood as adoption. Baptismal sonship and daughtership indicate a break with the earthly family, the granting of rights as heirs to the estate of eternal life and the erasure of the old life (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).

Thus, we have some significant passages in Matthew regarding this new relationship with the Father:

5:45 that you be children of your Father

6:6 pray to your Father in secret

6:32 your heavenly Father knows you need them

10:29 not one [sparrow] will fall outside of your Father's care

13:43 righteous shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father

18:14 not your Father's will that any of these little ones perish

The references mostly speak of the gospel, how the disciples are valued above sparrows, that the Father listens to their prayers, that he knows the details of their lives, he cares for their material needs, he grants them life in his kingdom, forgives their sins, will be honoured in heaven, answers their prayers (18:19) and wishes them to be saved.

Matthew can use heaven and kingdom, though his favourite term is **heaven**, literally **the heavens** οὐρανοῖς (5:45 et al). In summary, though there is a judgement, a demand for holiness and his will being done, having great power and glory, for the Father is Lord of heaven and earth (11:25),

overwhelmingly the tone and emphasis is on the relationship of love, grace and redemption the Father has with his world and particularly his children. The expression **in heaven** (23:9) has to do with this rule of salvation which is so utterly distinct to what happens on earth. On earth, relationships and life are characterized by power, immorality, death, temptation and the devil's sway. God is righteous, holy, willing to suffer for his world and give himself to it. Thus, to speak of the Father being in heaven is to refer to him as being someone transcending the ugliness of earth yet totally available to it and whose nature is far above the tawdry considerations of ordinary human beings.

Hallowed be your name. **Hallowed**, or be made holy, is in the aorist tense and passive voice: **hallowed be**. This one-off action points to the cataclysm of the eschaton that only the Father can usher in so that once and for all, he makes himself seen and is received for his sake alone. It also indicates that it is the Father who reveals his glory (כבוד in the OT), through his Son (11:25-27) is the one primarily responsible for the holiness of his name. As he makes his reputation known in the world, which is the weightiest matter of life, then he is making himself holy through those who believe his name (1Peter 3:15). Christians have a secondary role, to proclaim his word through which he reveals himself and live in harmony with it, so that his name will be honoured but that is not the primary thrust of the petition. It is no coincidence that the Spirit is called Holy, for he reveals the Father to the world and makes believers holy as well.

Hallowing has its starting point in the OT when the inspired writers referred to God's **name** as holy and should not be blasphemed or taken in vain (Deut 5:11; Ezek 36:21; Lev 22:32). Since the name of God can actually mean God himself (1Chron 29:16; Ps 33:21), holy became an adjective associated with the name: holy name (1Chron 16:10; Ps 33:21) and an object of praise, worship and thanksgiving (1Chron 16: 35). Names expressed the character of the person in the OT. The New Testament built on this foundation expressing the saving nature of the Lord's name (Acts 4:12; Rom 10:13; Matt 1:23). The Father's name is more than an identity; rather, it is his real self. The prayer is that the Lord would be his true self in the world and be received as such for only he can handle his name appropriately and he be revealed in the truth of his word.

In general, holy means to be set apart, thus, it could be applied to angels (25:31) and Jerusalem (27:53). It is used of the Spirit (1:18). God hallowed the seventh day (Ex 20:11) and the action of setting apart was integral with those things associated with God and his worship, such as the temple vessels (Ex 40:9). Thus the people of God, being separated from the nations, God hallowed (Lev 22:32). The petition then, is that God be treated in the world as Father, that his character to save be received in faith, that God be central and the weightiest matter of life. In this petition, the Father is drawing us to the centre so that believers do not lead fragmented lives but are completed in him. This means that as we are made holy through his name we are centred on him.

Yet, it is only in the Lord's Prayer, that this feature of hallowing is present.

Your kingdom come. Again, an aorist verb ελθάτω, which has an eschatological significance. It is a once and for all coming of the kingdom that disciples are praying for. Jesus spoke of this coming in 24:27-31. The parables of the workers in the vineyard, the wedding banquet, ten virgins, talents and sheep and goats also speak of an end time but they also refer to the necessity of entering the kingdom (20:1-6; 22:1-14; 25:1-46). The parables of sower, weeds, mustard seed, hidden treasure and the net (13:1-52) also speak of entering the kingdom but the chance to do so ending at the judgement. Thus, we have to speak of the kingdom coming to a person by faith and it coming at the end of human history.

What is prayed for is the end of history, especially the end of human rule in history. This coming of the kingdom is not just a change in societies but the inauguration of God's rule through the coming of Christ. This should not be perceived as a loss of the present but a joyful embrace of a coming gift. The Lord Jesus has given hope to his people in this prayer for the kingdom is the promise of something truly glorious, that rights terrible injustices and fulfills God's purposes in creation and humanity.

Secondly, faithful people can now be engaged in the coming of the great eschaton, that is, they can urge the Father to bring his future into the present by praying **come**. God's children are involved in a time that is eternal; in a sense, they pull levers that move the universe. The future kingdom is not a point the universe reaches but an event rushing towards us for it is the coming reign of Christ. Believers actually speed the coming of the kingdom 2Pt 3:12).

The connection to Jesus and faith in him and his word is clear in the gospels as the way a person enters the kingdom. John the Baptist spoke of the Christ coming with the baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit and fire (3:11) and Matthew ends with Jesus commission to make disciples through baptism into the Trinity. Praying for the kingdom to come, is to pray that where desires and human plans reign, the Father will bring something fresh and new that will completely reorient the believer's life. Hence, in 3:2; 4:17, the kingdom of God is offered to those who repent, who recognize that their management of their lives has ended in wrong and great evils. Therefore, a decisive moment in the Christian's life takes place, analogous to the great moment of Christ's glory coming into human history and the end of all things and the beginning of the Father's new order.

The rule of Christ in the believer's heart is a confrontation with the human will to control and to be master. Against this desire for autonomy is not God's victory over a person but his gift of victory over slavery to oneself through the gifts of forgiveness, love, salvation and resurrection, including the friendship and companionship of the Holy Spirit. Newness of life through the rule of God in the believer's heart has a societal impact as justice, equality, reconciliation and acts of mercy take hold in the culture and in politics. However, the kingdom is not a human rule and so these changes are only signposts pointing towards a coming future. The all-importance of the Father's kingdom means an ordering of the believer's life so that the believer develops a sense of scale in achievements and political actions, realizing that the humbler and quieter existence is appropriate. To use the word king as in **kingdom**, makes this clear. Christ is the king of kings (Rev 19:16) and all must bow before him (Isa 45:23; Phl 2:10).

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus considered the will of his Father supreme in his life and in the life of all believers. Indeed, 7:21 looks like doing the will of the Father a condition for entering the kingdom of heaven. However, the rest of Scripture makes it clear that the fulfilling of the Father's will is a sign of the genuineness of faith, which is what the passage is pointing at. The context is discerning the true or false prophet or believer by the fruit of their lives.

The Greek construction puts the doing of the Father's will in heaven before on earth. Literally it translates: **Let your will be done as in heaven and upon earth.** **Heaven** οὐρανῶ, or God's kingdom, is first of all an eternal realm. It is foreign to earth and transcends it. By our understanding of God's holiness or righteousness (5:48), heaven has to be a realm where his rule is responded to perfectly by all those there, angels and any other creatures. The prayer is focused **on earth**, where his will is not done at all in many places. The final petition in the triad, has to do with earth for a good reason. Hallowing the name of the Father takes us into the being of God through the truth and right understanding of his word, particularly his gospel. In the second petition, the transcendent rule of God's kingdom and saving love arrives. The third prayer is now concerned about what will happen on earth now that the Being of heaven and the realm of heaven arrive. The believer is, thus involved in cosmic and heavenly realities, realities that transform existence.

However, before that is considered, it has to be stated that the Father's grace that leads him to save humanity and his creation is what led him to bring his kingdom to earth through the birth of his Son. Therefore, logic tells us that this petition has to follow the previous one, which is the prayer for the coming of his kingdom. Grace precedes the law for the Father's will cannot be done until his kingdom is experienced.

When salvation is considered, the cross and the resurrection are in view but the ministry of Jesus is also the gospel. In terms of the Father's will, the Lord Jesus fulfilled it completely (26:42) despite its shocking cost for the Saviour. The Father's will is focused on sin and since it is

focused on the estranged relationship humankind has with God, it must also be focused on deception and temptation. This will be taken up in the sixth petition but in passing we note that Jesus defeated Satan and all the temptations common to human beings (4:1-11).

This brings us to what the will of the Father is. The temptations of Jesus make it clear that fulfilling God's will is not a matter of meeting religious duties and laws. Firstly, the Father's will is that human beings trust him and his saving love for them (6:30-33). They are not to live for bread alone (4:4) but the life-giving word, the new relationship with him and special status established through the good news (17:5; 24:35). After all, God is the Father and he can only be that when people believe in him. The third temptation concerned worship and clearly, as Jesus asserted, it is the Father's will that we worship him and nothing that is false or useless (6:19-21). Petition number one picks up this for it is the will of the Father that we hallow him, as Luther said in the SC. Following the first petition is the Father's will that his kingdom comes into the lives of all through the Spirit and that the baptized are ready for the coming of his kingdom once and for all. This petition, as in the first, will also involve evangelizing the world.

His will proceeds across the many other areas that the gospel touches, such as forgiving others, which is based on the declaration of justification or forgiveness granted by grace (9:2; 18:32,33; 26:28). The Sermon on the Mount contains other ethical injunctions revealed the true intent of the Father's will behind the commandments, for example the sixth commandment concerning adultery and divorce (5:27,28; 19:1-10). What is unique in the sermon, amongst other things, is the demand of love for enemies (5:43-47) which stems from a specific mention of the Father's unconditional grace for a sinful world. A life for prayer flows out of the Father's promise that he will be found by those who seek him (7:7-11). Mission is central to the Father's will as well (10:27). Jesus' message about a servant attitude has to do with how the gospel reverses status and power (18:1-5; 19:26-28; 23:11,12). Winning an erring brother or sister is about restoration and reconciliation rather than discipline (18:15-20). Finally, it is the Father's will that his children be ready for the sudden appearing of the kingdom and the Son of Man by living out his word and mission (24:39,42,44; 25:13,21) and his judgement based on a faithful response to him expressed in love for others (25:40).

Finally, the Lord gives his children this petition not only because of the sinfulness of humanity but because he wants his children to be like his Son. Already, this is clear from the way Jesus spoke about the life-style of the disciples. Their actions were to flow from his saving grace as well as be a copy of his behaviour. Jesus is the will of the Father personified. Prayer is the continual alignment of a believer's life with the Father's.

Luther's emphasis on warfare against the devil, the world and the sinful self indicates the opposition to God's person, his kingdom and his will (Eph 6:10-12). The human desire for autonomy so that the selfish and egotistical will of the individual rebels and fights against God's will. It is somewhat negative but still a sobering reminder of the need for the third petition.

Verses 11-13

Give to us today our daily bread.

Another aorist imperative, **give**. The Father prayed to by his people is a Lord who gives and without discrimination (5:45; Lk 6:35). He can be appealed to for giving bread because he is merciful, just and acts by grace. Luther understood this and explained in the petition on forgiveness that 'we receive everything by grace...and sin every day.' Again, in the fourth petition he stated the same idea: 'God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all people, though sinful'. The Father's hand is always open, often giving to people more than they need so that they can share with others who have less. Our world has sufficient bread for all and so this prayer Jesus gives to his people is based on the evidence of plenty. The pronoun, **us**, is important in this context because thoughts turn from God's person, kingdom and will, to the world of people, to **us**. The fourth petition, turns the one praying outward to the community and to all of humanity. From day to day, the lives of most in Judea and Galilee were hard and meals would have been quite lean as they are for many millions in the world today. Prov 30:8 encourages a

modest use of the earth's resources and this would be reinforced, too, by concern for the neighbour. The Second Bite organization and many other charities remind us of our general profligacy. We are praying for our bread and bread for others. Our work is important, too, without which, we eat another person's bread.

Today σήμερον reminds us of the feeding of the Hebrews in the wilderness by the manna, which the Lord commanded the people to collect but only sufficient for the day (Ex 16:4). It was to test them, so that they would obey and live by trusting his provision. Christ's teaching about worry, trusting in a Father who feeds the birds and clothes the hills with flowers builds on this prayer (25-34) yet he calls on his disciples to pray, which would have to be a daily prayer since **today** is mentioned. Faith is a constant dependence and never a presumption that bread is provided automatically, or worse, by our efforts alone.

When believers understand by faith who is actually at work in the universe and on this earth, then the prayer becomes an acknowledgement of this truth. Luther spoke of 'realising this and to receive our daily bread with thanks.' To an extent, day by day, the world of humanity, the economy and the earth, produce for us. However, believers are to realise that the Father has infused into this world giftedness, his power and blessing so that it does benefit us and all creation. It does have its own power and independence but that does not mean that the Lord is absent in any way. Indeed, he holds everything together through Christ's sustaining word (Heb 1:3).

Daily επιούσιον can mean the future, our future bread, but here it means **each day**. Literally, it means necessary for existence, that is, human need. It is used here, only in the Lord's prayer, and has the prosaic meaning of daily. Luther was right in talking about everything needed for daily life, including a good government. The fourth petition includes our physical needs because Christ considered our physical condition next to our need for his Father's kingdom. Material things are not beyond the interests of God. He fed the 5,000 (Matt 14:18-21) when they had no bread. The needs of our body were finally met in the resurrection; however, he did not consider them absolute. He directed us **to not live by bread alone** (4:4). Therefore, **daily** bread is prayed for, just as the Israelites could only collect manna for each day's use (Ex 16:17-19). Though work and technology put money in the bank and food on the table, our Lord includes this petition to help us realize his goodness, that we are to rely on him and be free of anxiety about our needs (6:25-34). Prayer is for daily necessities but not for daily luxuries!

The order is literally: **Our daily bread, give to us today**. This makes the prayer somewhat different to the emphasis Luther gave it. He considered the Father acting behind the scenes to arrange daily bread, long before any prayers were made. Christians would not doubt that, however, the order appears to make the provision for human needs contingent on our prayers. A freer translation might be: Considering our daily bread, please give it to us today. Such a prayer is a recognition of our humility before the Father, our complete dependence on him, and the necessity of prayer. There is a certain urgency in the prayer, probably arising from Jesus who, like many others, could not take daily bread for granted.

**And forgive our debts as we also forgive our debtors.
Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.**

Matthew's version of the fifth petition is better theologically than Luke's because he uses the word **as** ὡς, in: **as we also forgive our debtors** rather than **for** γὰρ, as we ourselves forgive everyone (Luke's version). Christ reveals that God's forgiveness is not conditional on our act of forgiving but the opposite, that God's gracious removal of guilt (and eventual removal of sin at the resurrection) motivates believers. Sin is not mentioned but **debt** τὰ ὀφειλήματα and **debtors**. The parable of the unmerciful servant (18:23-35) is a perfect example of what our Lord meant here. Even though the kingdom has come to us in Christ, he invites us to seek his Father's forgiveness and renewal for the on-going sins we commit. The fifth petition indicates the mercy that led Jesus to the cross and to defeat death, sin and the devil through his resurrection. The power to forgive is firmly based in the gospel, not in an attempt to be perfect in love.

When struggling against a sin, such as nagging, the believer must not plead with God to do better etc. This gives power to sin and to our enemy the Devil. Rather pray to God that he will fill you with his peace, to banish anxiety and perfectionism with his grace, to fill with the security of his love. We must not pray according to the old covenant, as though we need to achieve a higher spiritual and moral state. That cannot be done. Rather, we pray according to the New Testament gospel, that we are already holy, good, perfect, faithful, obedient children have met all the standards of God, a new creation in Christ etc. Thus, we ask for the power of grace, for the gift of God to be renewed in us. Rather than dwelling on your inadequacy, we focus on what we have by faith, the gift of Christ himself.

Of course, Jesus points his followers to the higher way of his love, to forgive enemies, turn the other cheek etc. (5:9,24,38-48). But to reach these levels a believer does not turn to internal strength or more intense prayer, but to the gospel, to the filling of Christ's love and redemption.

Do not lead us not into temptation.

The sixth petition must not be seen as an admission that God leads people into sin but rather, that our Father wishes us to conquer our temptations through the victory of Christ in his cross and resurrection. Testing or temptation is a reality of our situation in the world and its alluring sins, the devil and his power, and our sinful natures (Jas 1:14f.). Jesus exhorted his disciples to pray for deliverance in temptation (Lk 22:40). Clearly, the Father does not **lead** εἰσενέγκῃς his children into temptation. The verb literally translates: **may you not lead** (aor. Subj). In an Old Testament sense, all things are contingent on God yet he holds human beings responsible. This is his world and he allows temptation to exist but it is our responsibility to resist. The prayer, then, could be seen as a request that the Father does not allow his children to be tested beyond what they can endure.

Luther mentioned that the Father can provide us with the 'final victory', perhaps after many failures in life (SC). He understood temptation to be first 'false belief', then 'despair' and finally 'great and shameful sins'. Wrong faith or loss of faith are more severe than moral lapses. Today's culture provides the same temptation of pagan ideas, atheism, or the cult of the individual. Materialism is always there but the culture has shifted to despair and the fear of the world, climate change etc leading to a reluctance to have children.

Christ was **led by the Spirit into the wilderness** but he was not led into temptation by his Father (4:1; Jas 1:13). The purpose was for temptation in order to break the Satanic power operating in the world and to establish his righteousness. However, it was not his Father tempting him but the devil.

Each day is a spiritual wilderness for the saints and their preservation comes not from natural powers but the word of God. 1Cor 10:13 indicates that the Father allows temptation but also provides a way out because of his faithful love towards his people (2Peter 2:9). Thus, temptation is part of his plan, just as evil and sin are, but he forces them to serve his purpose of deliverance and ultimate salvation. Believers walk through a minefield every day and everyday they need help to be what they are meant to be and to stay with the truth and discern where evil and false ideas lie. Thus, prayer is necessary so that we do not fall whilst we think we are standing firm and are doing well (26:41; 1Cor 10:12).

Human beings tempt others just as Christ was tempted by his enemies (Mk 8:11; Mt 22:18). The situation for the children of God is the opposite: they want to be good and do good to please their Father. Temptation reaches the height of its power when it meets someone trying to remain on the narrow path that leads to life (7:14). The prayer takes disciples back to the first three petitions: the need to honour God's name and make him first, to pray for his kingdom to come and that his children do his will then the fifth, about reconciliation and forgiveness in the community of the church. Leading and guidance for the future centres around this single and most important purpose, that his children lead holy lives in trust and true faith (5:48; 6:33)

Though **deliver** $\rho\upsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\iota$ **us from evil** naturally follows the sixth petition, evil stands not only for Satan but all the evil to mind, body and spirit followers of Christ are required to endure by faith. **Deliverance** is ultimately the deliverance of the resurrection but also the deliverance from persecution when faith is under pressure and all troubles that will naturally attack a Christian's assurance. Deliver can also be translated as save and rescue, and reflects Christ's understanding of what will happen to his followers (chs 24,25). In John 17:11,15, the Lord has in mind the devil's work against his children as he acts through the world and its leaders. 16:33 reminds us that **Christ has overcome the world**.

So, the final petitions deal with existence, forgiveness, temptation and evil and show a direction the Lord gives to our lives after we pray for the Father's name, kingdom and will: we need to live, we encounter difficult relationships and fail ourselves, there is the danger we lose our faith and the world has little room or love for us. The Lord's Prayer perfectly encapsulates our entire existence under the Lord.