

## Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done: An Analysis of Matthew 6:10

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### Introduction

Over recent decades, the consensus interpretation of the second and third petitions of the Lord's Prayer has played a part in shaping our understanding of the "kingdom of God." The second petition is often understood *both* as a prayer for the coming of the eschatological kingdom *and* for the kingdom to grow in some sense. The third petition is typically understood as a prayer for increase in obedience to God's will. They are often linked together as more or less synonymous, with the third petition (your will be done) being used as an explanation of the second (your kingdom come).

For example, R.T. France writes: "The third of these clauses builds on the second: the essence of the coming of God's kingship is that he is duly obeyed and his purpose fulfilled."<sup>1</sup> Similarly J.M. Stubblefield: "The third petition urges, 'Thy will be done' (Matt 6:10). It is an explication of the preceding one. The kingdom of God is actualized whenever his perfect will is accomplished."<sup>2</sup> Missiologists Van Rheen and Parker explain: "The Lord's Prayer gives the most fundamental definition of kingdom in all Scripture... The phrase 'kingdom of God' is thus defined by the Lord's Prayer as 'God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven.'"<sup>3</sup>

However, attention has not been paid to the semantic range of the language used, nor to the use of the third petition elsewhere in the NT. It is the intention of this article to examine Matthew 6:10

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<sup>1</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2007), 246.

<sup>2</sup> J.M. Stubblefield, "Matthew 6:5–15" in *Review and Expositor* 87 (1990), 305.

<sup>3</sup> G. Van Rheen and A. Parker, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 72–73. Note also Scot McKnight: "These two requests are to be read together: God's Kingdom coming means God's will being done on earth." (*One Life: Jesus Calls, We Follow* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 32.) Tom Wright argues, "remember that 'the kingdom,' once again, is not 'heaven,' but the state of affairs in which God's kingdom has come, and his will is being done, *on earth* as in heaven." (*Virtue Reborn* [London: SPCK, 2010], 101.)

particularly with these considerations in mind. In doing so we will find that the typical interpretation can no longer be supported. Rather, the second petition is a prayer for the eschatological ushering in of the kingdom. It cannot have the sense of a gradual coming of the kingdom. The third petition is a prayer that God's sovereign purposes come about. It is not, as is often suggested, a prayer for the increase in obedience to God's will.

### **Context**

The Lord's Prayer consists of seven phrases, the first addressing God the Father in heaven, followed by six petitions. The first three petitions are concerned with God himself: that his name is sanctified, his kingdom come, and his will be done. The latter three, however, are personal requests asking for provision (bread for the day), forgiveness of sin, and deliverance from the evil one. The prayer is part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) which D.A. Carson summarises as being “concerned with entering the Kingdom.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Petition Two: Your Kingdom Come**

Βασιλεία σου (your kingdom) speaks of the immense reality of God's kingdom. While much could be said here, it is sufficient for our purposes to say that the kingdom is the long-awaited intervention by God to gather and save his people, bringing justice, judgment and restoration. The kingdom had come, in a sense, when Jesus entered the scene as king (e.g. Matt 12:28; Lk 17:21). Obviously, this is not what Jesus is praying for here. There are two perspectives held by commentators: the eschatological interpretation, and the gradual interpretation.

### **Eschatological interpretation**

First, the eschatological interpretation simply refers to the kingdom which is to come in the future when Jesus shall return and the new

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<sup>4</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994), 14. This is indicated at various points by its structure and contents. First, that the beatitudes begin and end with the declaration “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3,10–12). Second, the statements immediately before the body of the sermon, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:21). Then the conclusion begins, “Enter by the narrow gate.” (7:13). The fact that the kingdom is in view here is further confirmed shortly after when Jesus says “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father” (7:21). In fact, this question of who will enter the Kingdom dominates the entire conclusion in 7:13–27.

age begins. This is not suggesting that the kingdom was not present in Christ, but simply that this petition expresses a longing for that final day and prays for its arrival.

The eschatological interpretation is virtually undisputed for the following reasons.<sup>5</sup> First, while the kingdom is never the subject of the verb “to come” outside the Gospels, the idea of God, or his day of salvation “coming” is a major theme in the OT and other Jewish writing.<sup>6</sup> Nolland, therefore, suggests “the petition is readily understood as a reformulation in kingdom language of the OT anticipation of the coming of God in judgment and salvation.”<sup>7</sup>

Second, the second petition’s similarity to other Jewish prayers for the kingdom suggests an eschatological focus. In fact, some argue that “the first part of the Lord’s Prayer can be understood directly as a summary of the Qaddish.”<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps overstating the connection, since there is no certainty this version of the Qaddish was used in the first century. Nevertheless, the fact that “the coming reign of God is frequently prayed for in Jewish prayers”<sup>9</sup> adds weight to the eschatological interpretation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. France, *Matthew*, 246: “perhaps the most clearly futuristic reference to God’s kingdom in Matthew.”

<sup>6</sup> L. Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: IVP, 1992), 145–6; D.C. Allison, W.D. Davies, *The Gospel According To Saint Matthew Volume I* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1988), 604–5. See, for example, Mal 4:1.

<sup>7</sup> J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 289.

<sup>8</sup> U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7* (translated by W.C. Linss, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 379; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 606–7; C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 219–220. The Qaddish begins: “May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified in the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days.”

<sup>9</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 377–78.

<sup>10</sup> We might add to this the fact that Matthew’s prayer is found in full in the Didache. There are two other references to the kingdom which are both clearly eschatological. This suggests an eschatological hope was the likely understanding of the kingdom petition.

Furthermore, a third argument is sometimes mounted that this eschatological hope is believed to be the idea behind the first three petitions as a whole. Since the fullest manifestation of all three requests (however they may be understood), is found in the consummated kingdom, then this is likely to be the emphasis of all three petitions. Turner, for example, suggests: “To a certain extent, God’s character is revered as he rules on earth through people who do his will, but the main focus of these requests is on the future full manifestation of God’s reign on earth.” He therefore concludes that “the three ‘your’ requests should be understood as three ways of asking for essentially the same thing.” D.L. Turner, *Matthew* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 186; C.H. Talbert, *Matthew*

### Gradual interpretation

However, the second petition is often understood as requesting that the kingdom continues to come or to increase through this present age. This *gradual* interpretation is often upheld alongside the eschatological interpretation.

The basis for the gradual interpretation can be categorised into the following three arguments. First, a gradual coming of the kingdom is implied by the fact that the kingdom is already present. France suggests, for example, that “this petition is not so much asking that something may become true which is not true already (that God may become king) but rather that his actual kingship *de jure* may be fully implemented *de facto* as people submit to his sovereignty.”<sup>11</sup> Or Gundry: “Jesus taught a present coming of God’s rule (see esp. 12:28; Lk 11:20)... [which] suggest[s] a prayer that at the present time more people become children of God through taking on themselves the yoke of discipleship and so do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven.”<sup>12</sup>

Second, the gradual interpretation is supported by the content of the third petition (“your will be done”). As Dillon explains: “With the added phrase, ‘thy will be done on earth as in heaven,’ the necessity of active human cooperation in God’s triumph is expressed *by way of interpretation* of ‘thy Kingdom come.’”<sup>13</sup> Or as Stubblefield puts it: “The third petition... is an *explication* of the preceding one. The kingdom of God is actualized whenever his perfect will is accomplished.”<sup>14</sup>

(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 89. Garland likewise sees the three themes interwoven together throughout the OT, for example in Zechariah: “And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day, YHWH will be one, and His name will be one” (Zech 14:9). D.E. Garland, “The Lord’s prayer in the gospel of Matthew” in *Review and Expositor* 89 (1992), 219. Davies and Allison also point out that the same construction of the first three petition (that of aorist imperative + article + subject + σου) suggests “common content.” As does the fact that “‘on earth as it is in heaven’ could fittingly be subjoined to each.” (Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 603–04.)

<sup>11</sup> France, *Matthew*, 246.

<sup>12</sup> R.H. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 106. C.f. Turner, *Matthew*, 186–7; A.I. Wilson, “The Disciples’ prayer: A fresh look at a familiar text” in *RTR* 57 (1998), 144.

<sup>13</sup> R.J. Dillon, “On the Christian Obedience of Prayer (Matthew 6:5–13)” in *Worship* 59 (1985), 421.

<sup>14</sup> Stubblefield, *Matthew 6:5–15*, 305. See also France, *Matthew*, 246: “The third of these clauses builds on the second: the essence of the coming of God’s kingship is that he is duly obeyed and his purpose fulfilled.”

This is not at odds with an eschatological viewpoint. For, as Davies and Allison suggest, “if one sincerely prays for the realization of certain eschatological hopes, the present cannot but be implicated.”<sup>15</sup> The second and third petitions are, in a sense, co-interpretive and thereby demonstrate the “already-not yet” of the kingdom.

Third, a purely eschatological view of the coming kingdom is seen as being at odds with Matthew’s agenda in the Sermon on the Mount where his focus is on the obedience of the disciple. So, as Dillon explains, “Matthew’s repeated emphasis, in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, is upon bringing Christian conduct into harmony with the gifts received in Christ... expressing the ingredient of human obedience to God’s rule as prerequisite for the final consummation.”<sup>16</sup> France suggests: “To view these three petitions as purely eschatological is to defuse one of the most demanding prayers disciples can be called on to offer, with far-reaching consequences for the daily conduct of our lives.”<sup>17</sup>

### Analysis

There are problems, however, with the gradual interpretation. The second petition is for the kingdom to “come” (ἐλθέτω: aorist, active, imperative of ἔρχομαι). The verb ἔρχομαι simply means “to come” or “to go.” The emphasis is on the arrival and contrasts with the ideas of increasing, growing, etc. which are required for the gradual interpretation. This coming “often has the sense of appearing, of coming forward publicly, of coming on the scene. It is often used of decisive events, of happenings, of natural phenomena.”<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, as already mentioned, it is used with theological significance for the coming of God, angels, salvation, or Jesus himself. Jesus often stated his own purposes on earth using ἔρχομαι/ἦλθον sayings (Mk 1:38; 2:17; Lk 5:32; 12:49; Matt 5:17;

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<sup>15</sup> Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 606–07.

<sup>16</sup> Dillon, *Prayer*, 421–22.

<sup>17</sup> R. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew, An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 134. He goes on: “[T]o view them as purely ethical is to ignore the ‘blessed hope’ which is the mainspring of New Testament discipleship.”

<sup>18</sup> G. Kittel, G.W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich, (Eds.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1964), 667 (hereafter referred to as TDNT).

10:34).<sup>19</sup> It is also used in describing the coming and going of ages, the day of salvation or judgment, and, in the NT, the coming of the kingdom. Under such circumstances the sense is of something coming to pass, or coming in time. Therefore, it is the *arrival* of something theologically significant in view. It does not have the sense of increase or growth or gradual change over time.

We can easily see a contrast with the verbs used in the parables of growth (e.g. Mk 4:26–32) where we do not find *ἔρχομαι*. It is also noteworthy that in the phrases of motion or proximity associated with the kingdom, *ἔρχομαι* seems to be used predominantly (if not exclusively) with respect to the final coming of the kingdom (see Mk 9:1; 11:10; Lk 11:2; 17:20; 22:18).<sup>20</sup> This contrasts both with the announcement and offer of the kingdom to the crowds where *ἐγγίζω* (“at hand”, Mk 1:15; Lk 10:9,11; Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) is always used, and with the statements of the presence of the kingdom where *φθάνω* (“come upon”, Matt 12:28; Lk 11:20) or *ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἔστιν* (“is in the midst of you”, Lk 17:21) are used.<sup>21</sup>

“Your kingdom come” is a petition for just such an event and time to arrive. This alone seems to disqualify the gradual interpretation because it requires *ἔρχομαι* to mean something that it cannot mean. When one speaks of “progressive actualization,” or “implementation as people submit to God’s rule” or the like, it is not “kingdom *come*” they are speaking of. For that, a different verb would be required.

Moreover, it is significant that the aorist imperative is used here. Typically, the “aorist imperative serves to indicate *that* something is to be done, whereas the present imperative specifies how or when something is to be done.”<sup>22</sup> An aorist is simply a statement and

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<sup>19</sup> This is in line with its use in the wider culture, particularly in magical traditions, where a deity would be requested to come to someone’s aid. TDNT, 667. Speaking of the two instances in Matt 5:17, Morris suggests: “*I came* is a significant expression; it is not one that a person would normally use of himself. It will have a meaning like ‘came into the world,’ ‘came from God’ and points to a consciousness of mission.” Morris, *Matthew*, 107.

<sup>20</sup> Note, it seems correct to include the cries of the crowds and the question of the Jews since their expectation would certainly have been of a one-time arrival of the kingdom.

<sup>21</sup> It is noteworthy that in response to the Jews’ question in Luke 17 about the coming (*ἔρχομαι*) of the kingdom, we do not find Jesus using *ἔρχομαι*. Instead another phrase is employed. This suggests that the “*ἔρχομαι* of the kingdom” may be associated with its fulfilment.

<sup>22</sup> D.A. Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 186.

often, though not exclusively, refers to a one-time event rather than an ongoing process. This fits well with the eschatological interpretation and creates a problem for the gradual view.

Furthermore, an eschatological view does not contradict the idea that the kingdom arrived in Jesus. For example, in Luke 17:20ff the Pharisees ask Jesus “when the kingdom of God would come.” He responded by saying “the kingdom of God is (present tense) in the midst of you.” But immediately afterwards he speaks to his disciples of his second coming. Importantly, it is to those who recognised the kingdom’s presence in his first coming who, alone, were told the details of his, and the kingdom’s, final and ultimate coming at the parousia.<sup>23</sup> This passage also reveals the events in Jesus’ mind with respect to the “coming” of the kingdom. It is connected with the definitive acts of his first and second coming.

The setting of this prayer within the Sermon on the Mount, contrary to Dillon and others, actually brings this future kingdom more into focus. Not only is entry into the kingdom the great theme, but the context of that entry is the final judgment and the age to come (see particularly 5:20; 7:12–13, 22–23).<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the association between obedience and a gradual increase of the kingdom is not clearly stated in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>25</sup> Instead, obedience is commanded for the very purpose of *allowing entry* into the kingdom (see 5:20 and 7:21). This eschatological entry into the kingdom is the overarching concern of the Sermon on the Mount, and is therefore the likely context for the saying “your kingdom come” within it.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> As Bock says: “The kingdom may be in the midst, but its presence does not mean that the day of the Son of Man’s glorious coming has occurred. So Jesus now turns to the theme of his return, which will bring about the kingdom’s consummation.” D. L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1420.

<sup>24</sup> Note 7:22 “on that day,” and the illustrations of 7:24–27 implies a warning of ultimate judgment.

<sup>25</sup> In fact, a survey of the verbs associated with the kingdom in Matthew shows the following: Enter: 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24; 21:31; 23:13. Proclaim/hear: 4:23; 9:35; 10:7; 13:19; 24:14. Possession (is/belongs): 5:3,10; 19:14. Recline at table: 8:11. Seek: 6:33. Know: 13:11. Shine in: 13:43. Trained for: 13:52. Give keys for: 16:19. Inherit: 25:34.

<sup>26</sup> Notice also that the events which will finally and completely usher the kingdom in are central throughout Matthew (e.g. 8:11; 13:47–50; 24:29ff; 26:29). That reality, and the events which will usher it in, are not dependant on human activity. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Jesus warns the disciples, “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt 24:44). This is followed by three stories warning the

With these problems for the gradual interpretation noted, the second petition seems to be eschatological in nature. It is a prayer for the coming of Christ and the ushering in of the eschatological kingdom. It is unlikely to have added connotations of a progressive coming of the kingdom. Rather, it has the decisive, one time, future event in view.

### **Petition Three: Your Will Be Done**

The noun *θέλημα* (will) refers to that which one wishes to happen, or what is willed or desired. In Matthew, *θέλημα* is used exclusively with respect to the will of God the Father (Matt 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 21:31; 26:42). If we look more broadly to the Synoptics as well as Acts, all except one speak of the will of God (Mk 3:35; Lk 12:47; 22:42; Acts 13:22; 21:14; 22:14; with Lk 23:25 referring to the will of the Jews).

*Γίνομαι* refers to something “coming into being or existence.” Though very common and interpreted variously, it is important to note that *γίνομαι* portrays a distinct sense across all contexts, of something “coming about.” For example, when natural phenomena arrive (e.g. “and behold a great storm *arose* in the sea”, Matt 8:24 c.f. 8:26; 27:45); when something comes into being (e.g. the birth of a child, Gal 4:4); when things come to pass (e.g., after the events of Jesus’ arrest “all this *took place* to fulfil”, Matt 25:56 c.f. 1:22); when a new epoch or time arrives (Matt 26:2); and when a person transitions to a particular state or mood (Matt 6:16).

The sense of the word is of a particular circumstance or event taking place, a new state of affairs coming about, or a noteworthy event occurring. This petition, then, is simply a request that the will of God the Father come about.<sup>27</sup>

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disciples to remain ready for his coming which begin: “*Then* the kingdom of heaven will be like” (Matthew 25). This is not all that dissimilar to Christ’s first appearing. Notice his confrontation with the Jews where he declares to them (in Matt 12:28) that the kingdom had “come upon them” even though they remained oblivious and rebellious. These events will take place regardless of people’s readiness or prior activity. This indicates that the “coming” of the kingdom is God’s activity, and not that of humanity in general, nor the church specifically.

<sup>27</sup> As has already been discussed, some commentators consider the first three petitions together as a prayer for the eschatological kingdom to be established. We will not repeat the arguments for that view here.



### Obedience interpretation

Most scholars, however, suggest this is a prayer for the increase in obedience to God's law by human beings. Therefore, under the "obedience" interpretation, the third petition is granted when people obey, perhaps in increasing measure, the commands of Jesus.

Supporting this is the fact that Matthew often uses the noun *θέλημα* with respect to God's moral commands, as previously shown.<sup>28</sup> As a result, Nolland argues that: "Other uses of *θέλημα* ('will') in Matthew point us towards the same concern for obedience to God (Mt. 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 21:31)... that in a comprehensive way people should come to act in conformity to the will of God."<sup>29</sup>

It is striking, however, that in all of the examples cited by Nolland, we find the verb *ποιέω* (meaning "to do") acting on *θέλημα* instead of *γίνομαι* as in Matthew 6:10. Davies and Allison are one of the few commentators to acknowledge this issue and suggest that "'Thy will be done' seems to be the passive formulation for *ποιέω+θέλημα σου*."<sup>30</sup> That is, since the verb *ποιέω* is rarely found in the passive voice at all, and never in the Synoptics, another verb is employed which is common in the passive voice.

### Problems with the obedience interpretation

However, the obedience interpretation does not bear up to closer scrutiny for the following reasons. First, when *θέλημα* refers to the commandments of God, and obedience is commanded or described, *ποιέω* is used and not *γίνομαι*. There are six occasions where Matthew uses the noun *θέλημα*. Of these, three self-evidently refer to the moral commands of God which are to be carried out by people (7:21; 12:50; 21:31).<sup>31</sup> In each of these we find the verb *ποιέω*. The

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<sup>28</sup> A key example, since it is also found in the Sermon on the Mount, is Matt 7:21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *the one who does the will of my Father*' (*ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου*)." C.f. Matt 12:50; 21:31.

<sup>29</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, 145–46.

<sup>30</sup> Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 605–06.

<sup>31</sup> Note, Matt 18:14 does not deal directly with human obedience, but is instead a general statement of God's desire that all be saved.

same occurs without exception throughout the Synoptics and Acts (Mk 3:35; Lk 12:47; Acts 13:22).<sup>32</sup>

While Davies is correct that *ποιέω* does not appear in the passive voice, *γίνομαι* cannot be seen as an equivalent passive formulation. We have already defined *γίνομαι* as something “coming about”. With respect to miracles and answered prayer it carries the sense of a new state of affairs coming to bear in the given context. *Ποιέω*, however, has to do with activity; that is, doing, making or producing something. Simply put, the words do not mean the same thing.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly the frequent rendering of *γίνομαι* (typically the aorist, passive, but sometimes the aorist middle) as “done” in English translations of the NT dilutes the distinction between it and *ποιέω*. C.A. Ries has undertaken an extensive study on the use of *γίνομαι* and its root *γεν*. He laments the loss of the real meaning and significance of *γίνομαι* and says of the common translation “be done”, “The Greek word (that) more nearly corresponding to our idea of doing is *πράσσω* to do, practice, effect exercise, be busy with, carry on, accomplish, perform. BE DONE does not convey the true idea of *γίνομαι*.”<sup>34</sup>

His point is easily demonstrated. For example, in the English Standard Version *γίνομαι* is translated “done” on nine occasions in Matthew. All refer to a miracle, prayer, or answer to prayer (6:10; 8:13; 9:29; 11:20, 21, 23; 15:28; 26:42). That is, when English translations use “done” to translate *γίνομαι*, it is, in fact, the arrival of a new state of affairs, rather than human activity that is in view. On the other hand, when the ESV translates *ποιέω* as “done” it is always with respect to human activity (13:28; 23:23; 26:12, 13; 27:23). Here we see the understandable, but unfortunate, confusion from translating words with different definitions using the same

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<sup>32</sup> Note Acts 22:14 speaks only of “knowing” God’s will; Lk 23:25 speaks of the will of the Jews rather than God; Lk 22:42 and Acts 21:14 are quite similar to Matt 26:42 and will be dealt with below.

<sup>33</sup> We can observe this in the way *γίνομαι* is used throughout Matthew. The 75 references can be categorised into three groups: 24 have the sense of something “happening” (e.g. Matt 1:22); 38 have the sense of “becoming” such as a change of state (e.g. Matt 4:13); 13 are used in the context of miracles and prayer (e.g. Matt 8:13). None are associated with human behaviour or activity.

<sup>34</sup> C.A. Ries, “An Excursion with *Ginomai*” in *BETS* 5 No. 3 (1962), 69.

English word. They are not equivalent or interchangeable. C.A. Ries' detailed study into γίνομαι is illuminating.<sup>35</sup> He concludes: "These three essential factors lie inherent in this word γίνομαι: (1) It is a passive creative word. (2) Back of the creative act lies an intent, purpose, design. (3) It denotes *ingressive existence, a coming into being*: i.e., 'begin to be.'"<sup>36</sup>

Second, alongside this, the aorist imperative form of γίνομαι is exclusively used by Matthew in the context of answered prayer and miracles. There are five instances of this.<sup>37</sup> Three are used when Jesus is declaring a miracle into being. To the centurion: "let it *be done* for you as you have believed" (8:13); healing the blind: "according to your faith *be it done* to you" (9:29); healing a woman: "*be it done* for you as you desire" (15:28). The distinctive definition of γίνομαι can be clearly seen here. The healed state of affairs comes about at his word.

The remaining two, including the third petition, are prayers (6:10; 26:42).<sup>38</sup> We shall examine these further shortly. However, given what we have seen thus far, it is likely that a similar sense is intended. That is, the third petition is requesting that a miraculous state of affairs come about at God's command.<sup>39</sup>

The third problem with the obedience view is that it flattens out the concept of God's will to refer solely to the moral law of God that is able to be obeyed by humanity. However, God's will is regularly described in terms of God's sovereign activity and salvific purposes which may occur even *through* people's disobedience.

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<sup>35</sup> There he laments "The loss of the real significance of the meaning of γίνομαι is most apparent." Ries, *BETS*, 68.

<sup>36</sup> Ries, *BETS*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> The imperative of γίνομαι is found eight times in Matthew as either aorist passive (6:10; 8:13; 9:29; 15:28; 26:42) or present middle/passive (6:16; 10:16; 24:44).<sup>37</sup> Incidentally, in each of the *present* imperatives a change in a person's state or mood is indicated. That is: "do not *become* gloomy" (6:16); "*be* wise" (10:16); and "*be* ready" (24:44). This is consistent with the middle voice.

<sup>38</sup> Note that five of the nine aorist passive imperatives are found in Matthew.

<sup>39</sup> Against this it could be argued that all six verbs in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer are aorist imperatives, and, in fact, most prayers take this form, therefore nothing should be made of it. However, Luke's version does contain a present imperative for the request for daily bread – indicating that it is a request for an ongoing day-by-day provision of food is in mind. This option was open to Matthew if that was his intention. Furthermore, the typical use of the aorist in NT prayers suggests that rather than diffusing the normal understanding of verbal forms, a one-time event is what is normally sought after.

This is seen throughout the NT. James, for example, speaks of this in his warning against boasting and presumption where he concludes: “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills (θέλω), we will live and do this or that’” (James 4:15). He is clearly not speaking of the moral law (since remaining alive is outside the human capacity to orchestrate!) but of God’s sovereign will over all things. Another useful example is found in Acts 4 concerning the death of Christ. Despite the eager willingness of the perpetrators and that it was the most morally reprehensible of acts, the death of Jesus happened according to the prior planning of God (Acts 4:27–28).

We also see the noun *θέλημα* used of the will of God in a non-moral sense in Matthew 18:14: “It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” This is not a command that people can obey, which demonstrates that the will of God is more complex.

Therefore, while the NT often speaks of God’s will in moral terms which people can obey, it also speaks of God’s sovereign will where his broader purposes are served. If this level of God’s will is applied to the third petition, it takes on a completely different meaning. It is, in fact, the more likely interpretation.

With doubts about the obedience interpretation in mind, and by paying close attention to the definition and usage of the relevant words, another approach now presents itself. That is, the third petition is *a prayer for God to bring about his sovereign purposes*.

### **The Third Petition in the NT**

This is also the most natural reading of the three other instances where *γινομαι* and *θέλημα* form a similar construction as in Matthew 6:10: Matthew 26:42, Luke 22:42, and Acts 21:14. These are undoubtedly the most useful guide in understanding the third petition.

Matthew 26:42 and Luke 22:42 are their respective accounts of the prayer that Jesus uttered in Gethsemane. Matthew records: “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done” (*γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου*, the exact same construction as in 6:10). Jesus is awaiting his arrest and certain death with full knowledge of what was to come. Some commentators who take the obedience view assume that Jesus is praying for his own obedience. But that is surely ignoring the context. The circumstances were upon Jesus,

and the thrust of the prayer was one of submissive obedience in allowing the circumstances in train to unfold as God had ordained.

Luke records: “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (πλὴν μὴ τὸ θέλημά μου ἀλλὰ τὸ σὸν γινέσθω). Luke uses γινομαι in the present tense, which he is more prone to do, but there is no material difference in meaning.

Interestingly, in both accounts Jesus tells the disciples to pray that they do not “enter into temptation” lest they fall into sin through fear. This is surely harking back to the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus himself does not utter that prayer which suggests falling into personal sin was not his primary concern. Rather it was the impending circumstances that would result in his death that prompted the prayer of trust and submission to the sovereign purposes of the Father.

Finally, in Acts 21 Paul’s companions were urging him not to go to Jerusalem because a prophet had warned him of the persecution that awaited him there. Luke records: “And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, ‘Let the will of the Lord be done’” (Τοῦ κυρίου τὸ θέλημα γινέσθω). Paul felt called to visit Jerusalem despite the danger. Clearly it is not a matter of sin or obedience to the moral law here. Instead, it appears his companions are praying a prayer of trust that God’s intended circumstances would come about in the face of potential suffering.

This, it seems, is the best way to interpret the third petition.<sup>40</sup> The usage of this prayer in the NT aligns well with our earlier finding concerning the definition of γινομαι. It is significant that the context was one of suffering which lay ahead for both Jesus and Paul in their specific callings. It is particularly in this context that the prayer takes on this unique and rich application.<sup>41</sup> Finally, it seems unlikely that this third petition is an explanation of the second, or that they are synonymous.

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<sup>40</sup> We do not have space to deal exhaustively with the added phrase “as in heaven, also upon the earth” here. Most commentators agree that a contrast is being made. Also, whether this phrase applies to all three petitions or just the third does not affect the findings we have made thus far.

<sup>41</sup> See also *TDNT*, 55.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude, therefore, that the second petition is a prayer for the eschatological ushering in of the kingdom. It is not a request for the gradual coming of the kingdom in some sense. The third petition is not specifically a prayer for the increase in obedience. Instead it asks that God's sovereign purposes come about. It is a prayer of trust and submission to God's unfolding plan in the circumstances that lie ahead. It appears that Jesus offered it as a model prayer without reference to any particular situation. This is made clear by the two examples that exist in the NT where both Jesus and Paul prayed this prayer in the face of suffering. For each, their respective callings required them to walk through difficult circumstances and uncertain times. In such occasions, it is appropriate to pray in submission and trust "your will be done."