



Reformed Theology in Africa Series

Volume 13

# Biblical Theology of prayer in the New Testament

Edited by

Francois P Viljoen  
& Albert J Coetsee

Reformed Theology in Africa Series  
Volume 13

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of prayer  
in the New  
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# **Biblical Theology of prayer in the New Testament**

EDITORS

Francois P Viljoen

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## Research justification

This publication deals with a Biblical Theology of prayer based on the New Testament (NT). It forms the second of a two-volume publication on a Biblical Theology of prayer. These two volumes trace the concept of prayer throughout the Protestant canon, working with the final form of the biblical books in Hebrew and Greek Scripture. This is done by providing the reader with an overview of the concept of prayer in the subsequent corpora of the Old Testament (OT) and NT. The introductory chapter of the first volume elucidates the scope for this two-volume publication, followed by twelve chapters dealing with OT corpora. This second volume begins with an introduction on prayer and worship in early Jewish tradition, followed by eleven chapters dealing with NT corpora. This volume concludes with a final chapter synthesising the findings of the respective investigations of the OT and NT corpora in order to provide a summative theological perspective of the development of the concept of prayer through Scripture.

Although much has been published on the concept of prayer in the Biblical text, it seems that to date, no comprehensive Biblical Theology in which the concept of prayer is traced throughout the different corpora of the OT and NT has been published. The current publication intends to fill this research gap. It is assumed that such an approach can provide a valuable contribution to the theological discourse on prayer and related concepts. From this investigation, it is clear that prayer forms a major and continuous theme throughout the Biblical text. Prayer was an integral part of the religious existence of God's people in both the OT and NT. It underwent its greatest developments during, after, and as a result of the Exile and was deepened and transformed in the NT. In both the OT and the NT, God is the sole 'addressee' of his people's prayer. This conviction continued into the NT but was broadened with Trinitarian elements of worship, adoration, and intercession.

A Biblical Theological investigation is chosen as methodology. Since all the Biblical books form part of one canonical text, the assumption is that the various theologies about prayer being displayed in these books can be synthesised into a developing meta-theology about prayer. As the OT and NT form part of the canonical text, the results about prayer in the OT can be brought into play with the results about prayer in the NT. This eventually leads towards an overarching Biblical Theology of prayer. As a result, historical-critical issues are not dealt with in detail, though they are recognised in the contributions of individual chapters in this book. In addition, the aim of the approach was not to differentiate between the so-called 'undisputed', 'disputed' or Pastoral Epistles of Paul but to treat them thematically as a corpus. The same accounts for 1 Peter, 2 Peter and Jude.

No empirical research was conducted, and the investigation does not pose ethical risks. *Biblical Theology of prayer in the New Testament* is written by scholars for scholars. The target audience is peers and researchers.

All chapters are original investigations with original results and were cleared from possible plagiarism by iThenticate.

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# Abbreviations and acronyms, boxes, figures and tables appearing in the text and notes

## List of abbreviations and acronyms

ANE	Ancient Near East
ASV	American Standard Version
BA	Bachelor of Arts degree; Bachelor's degree
BCE	Before the Common Era
BDAG	Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CE	Common Era
CHE	Christian Higher Education
ESV	English Standard Version
ETS	Evangelical Theological Society
HB	Hebrew Bible (Hebrew)
JGU	Johannes Gutenberg University
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
MA	Master of Arts degree; Master's degree
MT	Masoretic Text (Hebrew)
NA	Nestle-Aland
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRF	National Research Foundation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NWU	North-West University

OT	Old Testament
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy degree; Doctoral degree
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PU	Potchefstroom University
RCSA	Reformed Churches in South Africa
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SU	Stellenbosch University
ThD	Doctor of Theology degree
THGNT	Tyndale House Greek New Testament
UBS <sup>4</sup>	United Bible Societies <i>Greek New Testament</i> , 4th edition
UK	United Kingdom
Unisa	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America

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# Preface

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Prayer, in some form or another, plays a central role in most religious communities. Prayer in Christian communities is rooted in Jewish worship practices. The origin and development of the Jewish service and worship of God are, to a great extent, recorded in the Old Testament (OT). This is investigated in the volume *Biblical Theology of prayer in the Old Testament* in the 'Reformed Theology in Africa Series' (vol. 12, AOSIS Books, 2023). The current volume, *Biblical Theology of prayer in the New Testament* (vol. 13, AOSIS Books, 2023), continues that investigation by exploring the subsequent development of prayer in the early Christian church. However, the transition from the OT to the New Testament (NT) cannot be done without considering developments within the inter-Testament times. Consequently, this volume starts off with an investigation thereof. This is followed by the investigation of prayer in corpora and books of the NT.

Due to the important role that prayer plays in Christianity, much has been written on the topic. However, it seems that very little is done to provide a comprehensive scholarly overview of the teaching of prayer from all the books of the NT. Furthermore, this publication specifically approaches the theme from a Biblical Theological perspective.

Specialists in the OT, Judaic Studies and the NT have been invited to contribute to this research project on the Biblical Theology of prayer. A two-day mini-conference was held, during which the participants presented their research. Based on rigorous discussions of these presentations, the contributors were requested to develop and finalise their research. This resulted in these two publications dealing with prayer in the OT and NT, respectively.

We trust that this publication will stimulate not only academic discourse on prayer in Christianity but also the practice of individual and corporate Christian worship.

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# Service of the heart: Prayer and worship in early Jewish tradition

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## ■ Introduction

As Jewish people, Jesus and his first disciples expressed themselves in worship and prayer along the lines of their own Jewish tradition. Jesus went to the temple to celebrate the High Holidays. It was his custom to attend synagogue services as well (Lk 4:16). The apostles continued praying in the temple at the set times of the traditional liturgy (Ac 3:1). Paul wanted to reach Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (Ac 20:16). He not only prayed, but he also brought gifts and made offerings in the temple (Ac 12:26; 24:17). The earliest expressions of Christian worship cannot be understood without considering the historical background and content of Jewish prayer and worship in the temple and synagogues during the first-century CE.

How was this liturgy organised, what was its content, and what can be said about the focus and theological weight of Jewish worship in the time of the New Testament (NT)? These are the questions on which the present chapter will elaborate. A well-known saying by the high priest Simon the Righteous, officiating about 200 BCE states: 'By three things

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the world is sustained: by the *Torah*, by *avodah* (worship, first of all in the temple) and by deeds of loving kindness [*chesed*]' (Avot 1,2).

Thus, *avodah* as worship is considered pivotal for Jewish life within God's covenant, even having cosmic dimensions, as it upholds the world. However, an elaborated Jewish 'liturgical order' cannot be found in contemporary literary sources. The first true prayer book dates back to the ninth-century CE (the Seder edited by Amram Gaon). Therefore, before entering into historical analysis and theological evaluation, the first section of this chapter will have to raise the methodological issue around the reliability of the sources at hand.

## ■ Methodology

Some problems arise when investigating the 'original' shape of the liturgy in the temple and the earliest synagogues. The Bible and intertestamental literature often refer to worship and prayer and mention is made of music, singing, praying and coming together at specific places, but nowhere is a fixed liturgy described. In the earliest discussions of the rabbis, as reported in the Mishna, we do find allusions to fixed liturgical traditions. But the debates and decisions concerning these traditions have been transmitted orally for several generations. The first literary sources, known as tannaitic, were collected around 200 CE.

Another problem for modern readers is that, when it comes to the content of what these rabbis decided, the prayers and benedictions are mostly referred to by their first lines, eventually supplemented by the last clauses of the prayer. For those to whom the regulations of the rabbis were relevant, the remainder of the indicated texts were well-known. As most of these lines are still present in traditional prayer books, some would add the rest of the prayer as it has been developed over the course of time. Thus, it seems hard to avoid anachronistic conclusions in studying these earliest Jewish sources.

An additional danger can be identified in the use of specific terms, which were coloured by their application in later Jewish and Christian traditions. For example, to most modern readers, the subtitle of the present chapter ('Prayer and worship in early Jewish tradition') would evoke specific images of people praying in the precincts of the temple or singing in a synagogue. However, the Hebrew term that comes closest to 'worship' is *avodah*, which literally means 'service', in the broadest sense of the word. It implies not only what happened in the temple during the hours that offerings were presented to God and probably parts of Scripture were read, but also prayers that were said and sung. The term also refers to the study of these Scriptures and obedience to the voice of the LORD in everyday life. Thus, *Torah*, *avodah* and deeds of loving kindness [*chesed*] belong together, as

Simon's statement in Avot underlined. What happened during a specific 'service' could be called the heart of this *avodah*, but in the minds of those who use this term, this 'liturgy' cannot be separated from its broader meaning, as is the case for the writers of the NT (cf. Paul's use of *leitourgia* in Rm 12:1).

## ■ Historical authenticity

However, having these caveats in mind, the reader should not be left with the impression that a historical analysis of liturgical practices at the time when the temple still stood can only lead to hypothetical presumptions. Firstly, recent research tends to be more positive about the reliability of oral transmission in general. The tannaitic traditions collected in the Mishna do not appear out of the blue. The rabbis were concerned about the continuity of their tradition and were used to memorising in a way unknown to us today. As liturgical traditions were not just shared by the rabbis, there was a larger audience in which these traditions were borne and cherished.

Then, rabbinical debate always concerns those aspects of the tradition on which opinions would differ. This implied that there was a broad consensus on those parts of the prayers that are not mentioned. The discussion would concern, for example, the correct order of the prayers or parts of their content. This implies that, at the time of these debates, a great deal of the liturgy was indeed fixed and commonly accepted. Thus, to mention an important example, the rabbis from the generation immediately following the destruction of the temple refer to 'the Eighteen' as a well-known term (Ta'an. II,2, Ber. IV,3; Instone-Brewer 2004, p. 54). This does not imply that they refer to exactly the same benedictions that are still known as the 'eighteen benedictions' – or *Amidah*, a central prayer in the synagogue service until today (elaborated below). However, it does imply that there was a consensus on the number, content and importance of precisely eighteen benedictions that were commonly offered in the prayer services at that time.

A third way of establishing the authenticity of an ancient tradition is by comparing these parts of rabbinic consensus with external sources that can be dated more precisely. Thus, the fact that the Ten Commandments (Dt 5) and the *Shema* (Dt 6) are often mentioned as important parts of the early liturgy can be confirmed by archaeological findings of amulets on which these texts are inscribed. Further archaeological evidence is the presence of pre-70 BCE synagogues decorated with symbols related to the temple. This proves without any doubt that what happened in these synagogues during the Second Temple period was felt to be connected to the temple service in Jerusalem. Besides these archaeological findings, there are many commonalities between the prayers that are referred to in

rabbinic literature and prayers and customs that are mentioned in the Apocrypha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the writings of Josephus and Philo and the NT. Examples will be discussed further in the text.

## ■ Continuity and diversity

This evidence will not result in a clear-cut liturgy from the time of the Second Temple or an unchallenged analysis of the mutual dependence of liturgical developments within the temple and synagogal traditions (Reif 1999, p. 328). Yet, there is no doubt about the fact that in the temple and in the synagogues where people were praying, these prayers were in some way connected, and there was much consensus about what should be offered in prayer. Even the shape of these prayers and their content can be traced in main lines.

Having made this point, it should be kept in mind that in the time of the Second Temple, Judaism was a pluriform phenomenon and scholars still differ in their interpretation of all the material. Some would state that by digging deeper into the historical roots of the liturgy, one could reach a more informal, 'original' shape of worship (e.g. Elbogen 1993; Fleischer 2012). Others, however, suppose that uniformity is the result of later developments, while there has never been a 'uniform original', as worship developed in several places and times responding to different challenges and needs (e.g. Heinemann 1977; Reif 1999). Indeed, there is evidence of movements developing in differing directions. After the fall of the temple, the rabbis tend to endorse more uniformity, while at the same time – in the course of history – liturgical traditions are always adapted to new circumstances, differing in time and region.

Thus, we should be warned not to jump to generalising conclusions on the one hand and not to be too suspicious about the reliability of the tannaitic sources on the other. Within the multifaceted landscape of Jewish tradition, some lines can be drawn about the liturgical world in which the first followers of Jesus shaped their worship.

## ■ Historical development

From the beginning, the focal point of Jewish worship is found in the temple, where the main focus is on the sacrificial cult. The various ways all differing offerings should be presented to the LORD are described in detail in the Torah. Occasionally, mention is made of reading from the Scriptures and prayer accompanying the sacrifices. However, these extra elements, pivotal to the *avodah* in synagogue services, seem to be a later development. A brief survey of what happened in the temple and how synagogue services developed in relation to the temple cult can give greater insight into the

close connection of these three components of worship – sacrificial cult, Torah reading and prayer – throughout history.

## ■ Torah reading

In some instances, the Bible mentions Torah reading in the tabernacle or the temple. Deuteronomy 31:11 prescribes the reading of the Torah every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles. In 2 Kings 23:1-3, King Josiah has the newly found Torah scroll read out in the temple. Ezra reads aloud the 'Book of the Law of Moses' on the moment of the Feast of Tabernacles in the newly rebuilt Second Temple (Neh 8). According to the Mishna (Yoma VII, 1), on the Day of Atonement, the high priest should read the instructions for this day from the Torah, accompanied by specific benedictions.

These data do not justify the later tradition that 'Moses (or, in parallel traditions: Ezra) instituted that the Jews should read the Torah on Sabbaths and festivals [...] (pMeg. IV, 1; cf. Elbogen 1993, p. 130). However, by connecting the few existing biblical instructions with the later development of reading the Torah at festivals and throughout the year in annual or triennial reading cycles, Jewish tradition underscores the theological importance of the reading from the Torah in relation to the temple cult.

## ■ Prayer

A similar development can be highlighted concerning the importance of prayer and personal confessions connected to the sacrificial cult in the temple. In the Torah, there are just two instances where a personal confession or thanksgiving is related to an offering – that is, when bringing a sin offering (Lv 5:5) and on the occasion of the presentation of the first-fruits into the temple (Dt 26:3-10). The Bible mentions some spontaneous prayers offered in the temple, such as, for example, the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the first temple (1 Ki 8:23-53) and the personal supplication of Hannah at the 'temple' at Shiloh (1 Sm 1:9-13). But, next to the daily sacrifices, there are no instructions for a daily prayer service. Therefore, Shaye Cohen (1999, p. 302) concludes that in the temple, 'prayer had little or no official place'.

Still, in the Prophets and the Psalms, there are obvious connections between the temple and prayer. The temple is called a house of prayer (Is 56:7). It is not only the place where people are praying, but the temple also determines the direction to which one is oriented in prayer (1 Ki 8:33; Ps 5:5; Dn 6:10). Several psalms provide insight into the way prayers were offered, most likely within the temple precincts.

According to the Mishna, the Levites would sing on the moment of the daily offering, that is, a specific psalm for each day of the week

(Tamid VII,4; cf. Schürer 1979, p. 303). The people gathered at the moments of prayer were involved, perhaps just by pronouncing a short response like 'Amen!'. Joseph Heinemann (1977; cf. the 'Amen' at the end of each part of the book of Psalms) stresses the importance of these responses, which is elaborated in later rabbinic literature:

The role of the response in public prayer is, then, a vital and substantial one: through his response, the listener identifies himself with the prayers of the community and becomes an active participant in its worship, though he may himself be unable to recite these prayers. (p. 16)

## ■ From temple to synagogue

Jewish tradition continually maintained the importance of the close connection of prayer to the temple service. When, in a later period, instructions were given to build synagogues in the direction of Jerusalem, this was theologically founded on the conviction that daily prayer and cultic offerings belonged together from the beginning (*Tos. Meg. IV:21, 22*). The Palestinian Talmud states in a later moment: 'He who prays in synagogue is regarded as if he had brought a pure offering' (*pBer. V:1, 8d*). This means that the sacrificial cult stays the focal point of worship, even when sacrifices can no longer be offered (cf. Cohen 1999, p. 318). The temple stays present in the synagogue, even if it is not there anymore.

Archaeological findings of temple symbolism in synagogues from before 70 CE underscore that this close connection is not the fruit of a later theological enterprise to find a substitute for the temple service. On the contrary, this connection was part of the institution of the synagogue from its very beginning. Moreover, this beginning should be dated at the time when the temple was still functioning (see e.g. the findings in Migdal, Aviam 2013).

## ■ Institution of the *ma'amad*

What is expressed theologically in later tradition may well reflect a historical development in which temple and synagogue services mutually influenced each other. Thus, prayer and Torah reading gradually pertained to a role in the temple – alongside sacrifices – while the (idea of the) sacrificial cult continued to play a significant role in the synagogue.

Several scholars have demonstrated that the origins of the synagogue can best be found in the institution of the *ma'amad* (Falk 1999, p. 859; Reif 1999, p. 330; Schürer 1979, pp. 254–255, 292–293). In the time of the Second Temple, the priests and Levites were divided into 24 courses who would each be on duty for one week (cf. 1 Chr 24:1–19). As it was important that there were Israelites attending the services, the whole nation was divided

into 24 courses as well. According to the Mishna, not all of these people could attend the offerings in Jerusalem each time. Those attending are called the *ma'amadot* – that is the ones 'standing' – in a proper sense (Ta'an. IV,1-4).

But the Mishna also uses this term for those belonging to a specific course who were not attending the actual service in Jerusalem. They came together in their own cities, it is stated, 'to read the story of creation' and fulfil other obligations connected to what the delegation of their *ma'amad* was performing in the temple (Ta'an. IV,2). Another tradition associates this meeting of the *ma'amad* with a specific place (Bik. III,2).

If this historical context indeed points to the origins of the institution of the synagogue, this illuminates the mutual influence of what happened in the temple and at those places where the other parts of the same *ma'amads* were gathering at the set times of the offerings in Jerusalem.

## ■ Mutual impact

Thus, the origins of synagogue worship should not be interpreted in competition with the temple, in which case Torah reading and prayer would replace the sacrifices in Jerusalem. Nor should it be interpreted as a post-70 CE invention to create a substitute for the temple. Theologically and historically, the developments of the synagogue and temple liturgy have mutually influenced and enriched each other. While prayer started as a form of participation in the sacrificial cult, it increasingly became an independent form of worship, on par with the sacrificial cult of the temple: 'Just as the sacrificial cult is called *avodah*, so, too, is prayer called *avodah*' (*Sifre* 41).

What started as a participation in the cult ended up as a democratisation of the cult, which enabled Jewish worship to be continued after the destruction of the temple. This prayer service as an independent fixed form of worship was, according to Joseph Heinemann (1977, p. 15), 'a startling innovation in the ancient world, which both Christianity and Islam inherited from Judaism'. In terms of content, it explains the pertaining close connection between *avodah* in the sense of the sacrifices in the temple and as worship and prayer in the synagogue, both connected to Torah reading and study.

## ■ Prayer as offering

The connection between prayer and sacrifice underscores the theological weight of prayer in Jewish tradition. Next to the importance of the Torah and deeds of loving kindness – in Simon's saying, both 'sustaining the world' – *avodah* as prayer came up as a third pillar. The Talmud even brings

up the saying of Rabbi Elazar: 'Prayer is greater than sacrifices, as it is stated: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me, says the Lord [...]" (Is 1:11)' (Ber. 32b).

## ■ **Avodah of the heart**

Apart from the weight of prayer, the indicated development also determines its direction. Because of its connection to the sacrificial service, prayer was not primarily focused on petition but on offering – not on something the supplicant would like to receive from God, but primarily on God himself. Thus, prayer can be called the *avodah* of the heart, as an extension and new expression of the *avodah* in the temple. 'What kind of service [*avodah*] is that which takes place in the heart? We must answer: "It is prayer!"' (Ta'an. 2a).

This way of approaching prayer is not, as stated before, an invention of a later date, it can be understood from the context in which synagogue prayer developed. Even before, the prophet Hosea spoke about prayers as the 'bulls of our lips' (Hs 14:3), while in Psalm 141:2 prayer was compared to the incense at the evening sacrifice. At the moment that no bull could be presented any more, and incense no longer rose in the temple, the lips continued to be offered to God, and with these lips the hearts. This focus on worship as offering, shaped by the context in which these prayers developed, has been kept in Jewish tradition. A recent introduction to an edition of the Siddur [Prayer Book] succinctly articulates this accent on offering by comparing it to prayer that is focused on requests: 'the difference between prayer-as-request and prayer-as-sacrifice is that request *seeks*, sacrifice *gives*' (ed. Sacks 2009, p. xxxviii).

## ■ **Prayer as offering and as 'redemption'**

Prayer as offering opens a theological perspective on everyday life. What is the reason to offer something to God in prayer, Jewish tradition asked. First, in this way, one realises one's own place as a creature by giving back what was received from God as Creator (Instone-Brewer 2004, pp. 72–74). King David is often quoted as an example for this. After laying out all kinds of materials for the building of the temple as an offering to God, he prays (1 Chr 29):

But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly?  
For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. (v. 14)

That is the movement of worship as offering; putting what was received, eventually our whole life, back into God's hand.

But that is not the only thing. Through this way of offering in prayer one subsequently receives back what was placed in his hand. By experiencing prayer as a gift *to* God, Jewish tradition creates room to enjoy the gifts *from* God in a new way. A tannaitic source states:

A person should not taste anything until he makes a *berachah* [ *blessing*] on it, as it is said, 'To *Hashem* is the earth and its fullness [...]' (Ps 24:1). A person who receives pleasure from this world without a *berachah* makes inappropriate use of sacred property. (*Tos. Ber. IV,1*)

Psalm 24 confesses that everything belongs to God, which means that everything is sanctified. And it is forbidden to enjoy something which is sanctified. Therefore, as an example, a firstborn child should be redeemed before receiving it back from God's hand (cf. Ex 13:15). In an analogous way, prayer functions as offering the price of such a 'redemption'. By offering God's gifts back to him, they can be received from him consciously again and thus enjoyed from a new perspective. So, by offering a benediction, a divine dimension can be experienced in every aspect of life (Hammer 1994, p. 92).

## ■ Form

The form of the *berachah* or benediction reinforces this direction. Jewish prayer prominently starts like David's prayer, just mentioned: 'Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father [...]' (1 Chr 29:10). In this way, God is the subject of each benediction (Heinemann 1977, p. 235). Even those prayers that hold petitions are framed by such a doxology, which focuses the mind of the supplicant on God. By blessing God, in distinction from thanking him, prayer is entirely focused on God himself. In thanking, the attention of prayer is drawn to the gift for which God is acknowledged as the giver.

In a certain sense, the subject of thanksgiving is the gift itself, or the one who received it: 'I' or 'we thank you'. In praise, however, the focus is not on the one who thanks for what they received but on the one to whom one turns in prayer: 'You'. He is the subject of praise; if not always the syntactic, at least the logical subject.

This address of prayer concurs with many biblical examples: God is addressed as 'You, YHWH', which is followed by verbal or adjectival phrases (e.g. Ps 86: 5, 15, 17). The extended 'Blessed are you, YHWH, who [...]' keeps the focus on the subject of praise (cf. Falk 1995, p. 275). Such a blessing of God might even be called a higher expression of worship than praising him. To bless him 'is to bestow upon God the highest attributes we are capable of imagining and to proclaim Him before the entire world', Rueben Hammer articulates (1994, p. 136).

In a Dutch introduction to the Siddur, this attitude is recommended as the best way to approach God. 'In prayer as asking, we speak to God,



in prayer-as-benediction, God speaks to us' (Hausdorff 1979, p. iv). Even the words that are offered to God in blessing are experienced as a gift from God. So, this new theological perspective on all things that are received back in prayer is a gift from God as well.

## ■ New Testament

This perspective is helpful as a frame to understand a similar direction of prayers in the NT. The Greek wording for *berachah* would be *eulogia* or *eucharistia*. When Jesus, dividing the bread that was provided to him, said a blessing (Mk 6:41 and par.), he did not bless the food, but he blessed the Father. The common wording of that blessing still is: 'Blessed are You, o LORD, our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth'. Paul alludes to the meaning of this *berachah* when he admonishes Timothy (1 Tm 4):

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving (*berachah*), for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (vv. 4, 5)

By this 'thanksgiving', the apostle reminds Timothy of the prayer he would normally say at the beginning of his meal: 'Blessed are You [...] who created this'. If you pray in this way, Paul suggests, you may also take it in this way. This food is holy, sanctified to God. And in blessing God for that, Timothy may trust that he has received it back from God. Therefore, false teachers should not declare it unholy and reject eating it. On the contrary, by Timothy's prayer, it is redeemed, and he is free to eat those things for which he blessed God as the giver.

Similarly, the apostle writes about his own freedom to eat the food over which he said a blessing: 'If I partake with thankfulness [i.e. say a *berachah*, bless God for my food], why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?' (1 Cor 10:30). Paul is sure that no one can judge him for what he would eat, as he has acknowledged God for it in his *berachah*. Remarkably, Paul quotes precisely in this context the words from Psalm 24 that are connected to the idea of 'redeeming' food by the blessing [*berachah*] over the meal: 'For "the earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof"' (1 Cor 10:26). If that is acknowledged in the *berachah*, the food is received in a new way from God's hand, writes the apostle in accordance with the Jewish tradition of this prayer (Instone-Brewer 2004, p. 74).

By practising prayer as an offering, a new theological perspective is given, yielding new insights into the challenges that Paul and Timothy are facing. Thus, the apostle is a witness of the same remarkable feature of prayer, as was noticed in Jewish tradition, which might be helpful for actual challenges as well. It is not by experiencing gifts as gifts that one is brought to prayer of thanksgiving; it is by pronouncing the *berachah* as an act of obedience and acknowledgement that God's gifts can be experienced as gifts.

## ■ Order of the liturgy

Although the earliest sources do not contain an elaborated liturgical order, there are several indications about set times of prayer, as well as of some elements of ordered worship, commonly accepted in the first-century CE.

## ■ Times of prayer

In the NT, mention is made of the ninth hour as a ‘time of prayer’ (Ac 3:1). This seems to correspond to the hour of one of the daily offerings, the *Tamid*, as prescribed in Numbers 28:4 for the afternoon. That the evening *Tamid* was offered at the ninth hour, which can be estimated between 15:00 and 16:00, is reported by Josephus as well (A.J. 14, 65). Elsewhere, Josephus relates these offerings to set moments of common prayer in the temple (cf. Heinemann 1977, p. 15, n. 1). An earlier source suggests the same connection. In the book of Sirach (second-century BCE) the daily offerings are described, during which trumpets are sounded. At that moment, all those gathered in the temple ‘fell face down on the ground [...] with prayer for the Merciful One, until the LORD’s arrangement was completed and they finished their administrations’ (Sir. 50:17, 19). In the prayer that follows in the book of Sirach, elements can be heard of the *Amidah*, which will be discussed.

Accordingly, the earliest rabbinic sources associate the times of prayer with the moments that the Torah had ordered for the daily offerings (*Tos. Ber. III,1,2*, cf. *Ber. 26b*). The apocryphal book of Judith relates the individual prayer of Judith to the hour that ‘the incense for that evening was being carried into the house of God’ in Jerusalem (Judith 9:1). Joseph Heinemann connects this to what happens in Luke 1:10, where Zechariah offers the incense at the moment of the *Tamid*, while the people were praying (Heinemann 1977, p. 15).

In the scrolls found at Qumran, several references to a daily prayer rhythm twice a day can be found as well. However, the rationale for these set times is mostly connected to the course of the sun. This is true for the typical sectarian texts, for example, the *Community Rule*: ‘With the arrival of day and night, I will enter into the covenant of God’ (1QS 10:10). In the scroll of *Daily Prayers* (4Q503), God is blessed with the same formulae as noted before from rabbinic tradition. The prayers are opened by the formula: ‘Blessed be the God of Israel, who [...]’, and they are closed by a blessing directly addressing God: ‘Blessed be your name, God of Israel’ (Falk 1999, p. 856). However, the times of prayer are not connected to the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem but to the rhythm of day and night.

The same applies to some texts that probably antedate the time of the sect. Thus, in the so-called *Words of the Luminaries*, the times of prayer are related to the creational order, by which these prayers are experienced as

unifying the worshippers with the heavenly praise of the angels (4Q504, 506; cf. 4QBer.; see Falk 1999, pp. 854, 857).

The use of praying *three* times a day seems to be a conflation of these two traditions. The morning prayer [*shacharit*] was offered at about the same time in both systems, the *mincha*-prayer developed from the link to the afternoon *Tamid*, while the third prayer [*ma'ariv*] was said at the moment of sunset. Perhaps at first, or in some traditions, this last prayer was only offered at home or as an individual prayer in the temple (cf. Falk 1995, p. 292). As the book of Daniel already mentions the habit of praying three times a day (Dn 6:11), the fusion of prayer-schedules was obviously not just a late combination of traditions.

These observations attest to the multifaceted shape of early Judaism. In the Slavonic book of Enoch, three moments of prayer a day are related to the rhythm of day and night while simultaneously being linked to the temple service (2 En 51:4, 5). The fact that the Talmud reflects a later discussion that tries to connect all three prayer times to the biblical *Tamid* shows that the weight of this connection to the sacrificial cult was felt, while at the same time – at that moment – the tradition of a statutory prayer three times a day was an established custom that could not be altered any more (*Ber.* 26b; cf. Moore 1997, p. II, 220).

## ■ Pivotal elements of earliest worship

Normally, the prayers would be offered by someone leading the service. This is confirmed by the frequently repeated 'amen' in psalms and other prayers in biblical times (e.g. 1 Chr 16:36; Neh 8:7). Likewise, in the earliest Christian communities, prayers were offered by a member of the community as well (1 Cor 11:4). In synagogues, the prayer-leader was called the *shaliach tsibbur*, (the messenger of the community, cf. *Ber.* V,5, *Rosh Hash.* IV,9) or, in Greek, the *archisynagogos* (cf. Mk 5:22, Lk 8:49, 13:4, Ac 13:15, 18:9). The call to prayer was typically introduced by the imperative of *lebarech* (to say a *berachah*, *Ber.* VII,3, *Tam.* V,1, cf. Neh 9:5). The Mishna describes what happened after this appeal, indicating the kernel of the earliest services. *Tamid* V,1 articulates:

(The officer) said to them: 'Recite a benediction!' [*Barkhu!*]. They recited a benediction, and read [*qar'u*] the *Ten Commandments*, the *Hear [...]* (*Shema*, Dt 6:4–9), *And it will come to pass if you will hear [...]* (Dt 11:13–21) and *And the LORD spoke to Moses [...]* (Nm 15:37–41). They pronounced three benedictions with the people: *True and Sure*, and [*Temple*] *Service [Avodah]* and the *Priestly Blessing*. And on Sabbath they pronounced a further benediction for the outgoing course of the priests.

After an introductory benediction, four portions of Scripture are read. In Hebrew, the verb for reading from Scripture [*qara*] is distinguished from

the verb that is used for the reading or reciting of a benediction or other prayers [*lebarech*]. Three passages from the Torah follow the *Shema*, suggesting that they belonged to the *Shema* as well – as is the accepted custom until today. In another tractate of the Mishna, the reading from Scripture – after the *Shema* – is elaborated and combined with the custom of reading a portion of an established reading cycle (Meg. IV,3).

After the reading from Scripture, three benedictions are mentioned. The first one, *True and Sure*, is still connected to the reading of the *Shema*. The second, *avodah*, is part of the eighteen benedictions, which, according to the Mishna, should be prayed three times a day (Ber. IV,1). The last benediction (i.e. the Priestly Blessing) is evidently part of the liturgy from biblical times.

Putting this evidence next to other available sources that will be pointed out, in main lines, four elements can be distinguished: (1) the recitation of the *Shema* (and the Ten Commandments), with (2) eventually an extended reading from the Torah, (3) the benedictions, *avodah* or prayer in a stricter sense of the word and (4) the Priestly Blessing. The rest of this paragraph will clarify these four elements in an attempt to approximate the core of Jewish worship in NT times, leaving aside post-tannaitic developments.

## ■ Shema

The recitation of the *Shema* as a daily confession of faith accompanied by benedictions – both in and outside the temple – can be seen as ‘one of the earliest forerunners of synagogal liturgy’ (Reif 1999, p. 350). It will not be by accident that it receives a solemn extra introduction in the translation of the Septuagint (Dt 4:4a LXX). From the following evidence – which reflects the injunction in the *Shema* itself, to confess the name of the LORD while lying down and raising up (Dt 6:7) – it may be concluded that the reading of the *Shema* was an established element of public and eventually private worship in the time of the NT, at least twice a day.

According to rabbinical tradition, it was read together with the recitation of the Ten Commandments (as stated by Tamid V,1). This use is confirmed by several liturgical compilations found in Qumran (Falk 1995, p. 287, 1999, p. 855; Baumgarten 1996, p. 205). Archaeological findings establish the importance of both texts, sometimes in combination, during the period of the Second Temple. At Qumran and in the *wadi Murabba'at*, numerous amulets and tefillin were discovered, on which both the *Shema* and the Decalogue are prominently present (Feldman 2022, pp. 9-12). Also, on the Nash Papyrus, probably a liturgical text or a kind of phylactery, the *Shema* is combined with the Ten Commandments (Elbogen 1993, p. 23). Josephus supposes that the use of citing both the *Shema* and the Ten Commandments

twice a day was an institution from the time of Moses (A.J. 4, 212). Thus, both the combination of these texts and their ancient liturgical use, probably in the temple and synagogues, are firmly established for the first century and even before.

It is certainly a later development that the Ten Commandments were omitted from regular worship, most likely in response to the Christian adoption of reading the Ten Commandments. Its Christian usage was considered antinomistic, as it tended to limit the relevance of the Torah to just these ten words. That might be the background of the later development to leave out the recitation of the Decalogue in synagogues (cf. Ber. 12a; Hammer 1994, p. 81).

Focusing on the *Shema* itself, the text of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 was in an early stage connected to two other biblical passages, elaborating the commandment to hear the voice of the LORD and to love him. In Deuteronomy 11:13-21, the appeal to listen to the words of the LORD is followed by a promise of blessing, a warning to take heed of these words, and a repetition of the commandment to bind them as a sign on the body and as a spiritual companion on heart and soul. Numbers 15:37-41 connects this injunction to the law of wearing *tzitzit*.

According to Ismar Elbogen, the Mishna knows 'the three passages only as a unit' (Elbogen 1993, p. 23; cf. Ber. II,2; Tamid V,1). However, it may be disputed whether the second and third passages were considered a part of the *Shema* as early as the first-century CE. The reading of these passages, which can be seen as midrashic extensions of the original *Shema*, is not supported by evidence outside the rabbinic sources. In particular, the reference to the *tzitzit* in Numbers 15 may be better understood from a halachic rather than from a liturgical context.

According to Tamid V,1, the *Shema* should be accompanied by three benedictions. Other tannaitic discussions mention several benedictions around the recitation of the *Shema* as well (Ber. I,4, Tos. Ber. II,2).

In a later period, these blessings are clustered around three particular benedictions that are concentrated (1) on the light, blessing God as Creator [*Yotser or ...*]; (2) on the Thora, blessing God for his revelation [*Ahava ...*]; and (3) on redemption, blessing God for being the Rock of his people [*Emet weyatsiv ...*]. The first two benedictions are said as an introduction to the *Shema*; the third one leads from the *Shema* to the *Amidah*, the eighteen benedictions.

According to Joseph Heinemann (1977, p. 230), they must be considered 'as a single unit which came into being in its entirety at a very early date'. Tannaitic sources, however, do not provide their exact wording and even differ in their content. The Tosefta depicts a debate on the content of the

last benediction, which is called the same way as in Tamid: *Emet weyatsiv*, *True and Sure*. So, the beginning was clear in tannaitic times already, as well as the main issue that was mentioned in this benediction: God's kingship and redemption. But whether there should be a reference to the Plague of the Firstborn and the Splitting of the Sea is still under debate (*Tos. Ber. II,2*). In later tradition, the benediction *Emet weyatsiv* is said after the *Shema*, amplified by references to even more aspects of the history of the Exodus, for which God is blessed as the 'Rock of Israel', 'our Redeemer' (combining Ex 15:11, 18 and Is 47:4). The discussion about this benediction thus reveals that the text of the prayers was commonly accepted already, at least partly, but was still growing in a living liturgical tradition. This vivid character of liturgy can be underscored by the remark in the Mishna that the *Shema* may be said in Hebrew or in any language (*Sot. VII,1*). A later source has a testimony of a reading of the *Shema* in Greek (*Sot. 21b*).

Its heart and starting point were indicated in a clear biblical commandment, which was continually expanded in order to relate this confession of God's unity to everyday life by adding midrashic explanations and blessings. In the course of time, these benedictions clustered around three important themes: blessing God for his creation, his revelation and his redemption.

## ■ Torah reading

Next to the reading of some specific passages, in a very early stage a regular reading from the Torah was added to the service in the temple and in synagogues. It has already been mentioned that in the Bible, there are only a few instances where the Torah is read in the temple, while the Mishna literally reports a Torah reading during a service on just one occasion. Yet it is known that the sect of Qumran was used to the practice of a regular public reading of the Torah. From the regulations for this, it can be concluded that according to the members of the sect such a reading also took place, or according to them should take place, in the temple (Schiffman 1999, p. 46). Apart from these public recitations, the Bible was also read in communal and personal study sessions in Qumran, as might have been the case in the temple.

Although the Mishna does not describe a regular reading from the Torah, this was certainly an essential element of the liturgy in the synagogue, which developed while the temple was still there. According to Josephus, people met weekly in the synagogue to 'listen to the Torah' (*C.Ap. 2, 175*; cf. *A.J. 16, 43*). The same is told by Philo, who speaks of a gathering in 'synagogoi', where 'the holy books' are read and explained (*Dreams 2, 127*). An inscription on a pre-70 CE synagogue in Jerusalem indicates that this building was designated 'for the reading of the law and the teaching of the

commandments' (the Theodotus Inscription, cf. ed. Schiffman 1998, p. 474). The oldest written records of readings from the Torah in synagogues – with subsequent readings from the Prophets – are found in the NT (Lk 4:16–21; Ac 13:15, 27).

The earliest rabbinic sources do not elaborate on an established reading cycle, but they report discussions on questions that arise because of the existence of such cycles. Thus, there is a debate about the issue of whether there are passages that should not be explained after reading from the Torah, as well as from the Prophets (Meg. IV,10, about e.g. Gn 38, *Tos. Meg.* IV,31).

Another issue arises when a choice has to be made between two different readings. That appears to be the case on a Sabbath during a festival, for which apparently some appropriate readings were prescribed, while at the same time another schedule had another portion designed for the same week (Meg. III,4). A similar problem arises when the Torah portion from a regular reading cycle nearly collides with the moment that the same passage was read on the occasion of a festival (*Tos. Meg.* III,4). Such a clash can only occur, when the regular order is not connected to a one-year reading cycle (which would take the festivals into account). This confirms the idea that, in the first century, a three-year reading schedule already existed in Palestine, which was later supplanted by a one-year schedule originating in Babylonia (Meg. 29b; Reif 2006, p. 49). The fact that tannaitic sources – mentioning rabbis from the first century – reflect on these collisions indicates that apparently, at that time, several established reading schedules already existed.

For us, it is a pity that the only parts of the discussions that survived in the Mishna are not about the content of those cycles but merely about what to do when they conflict. However, these debates at least give evidence of the existence of some established reading traditions by the first century, both from the Torah and from the Prophets (cf. for a reconstruction Perrot 1988, pp. 141–143).

The Mishna also supposes that at the beginning and at the end of the readings from Scripture, a benediction would be said (Meg. IV,2). After the reading, there would be an explanation, probably preceded by a translation in Aramaic (Meg. IV,4,6,10). It is followed by a sermon in which the portion is explained and related to the lives of the worshippers (cf. the quotation from Philo, the Theodotus Inscription and the NT, e.g. Mt 4:23, about 'teaching' in synagogues).

Study of the rationale for the choice of the readings from the Prophets – the so-called *haftaroth* – connected to the portions from the Torah, has demonstrated that, in the Palestinian three-year cycle, these *haftaroth* functioned as a lens through which the Torah was read and applied to actual situations. Most of the *haftaroth* are taken from Isaiah 40–66,

frequently referring to the redemption of the people of Israel and their return to the land (Fishbane 2002, p. xxvi). This kind of eschatological and Messianic hermeneutics can be compared to the way biblical texts were read and explained in the sect of Qumran (Patte 1975, pp. 311, 312), as well as to how the NT applies passages from the Old Testament (OT) to the Christian community, sometimes making use of the same existing liturgical connections (Mulder 2021, 2023).

## ■ Eighteen Benedictions

A third component of daily worship in the time of the Second Temple was prayer. Tamid V,1 alluded to several benedictions. In other discussions from the tannaitic period, a number of eighteen benedictions is mentioned (Ber. IV,3, Ta'an. II,2). There, the rabbis suggest that these eighteen blessings were commonly known and used as the main prayer. Joseph Heinemann (1977) summarises a commonly held opinion:

The custom of reciting precisely eighteen benedictions must have crystallized sometime during the century before the destruction of the Temple [...] out of all the various series of benedictions and petitions. (p. 224)

Again, tannaitic sources do not quote the exact wording of these benedictions. Even in the period of the Talmud, there was no uniform consensus about the right order, nor on the exact content of these prayers (Elbogen 1993, pp. 35, 36). Yet, there was a prayer that was commonly accepted. This prayer was fixed, although rabbis in the first century felt that their wording should not be followed too strictly and that, on some occasions, an excerpt of its substance would do as well (Ber. IV,3). Others urge that each person should add a new prayer to the statutory form, 'so that it should not be like reading a letter' (pBer. IV,3). The emphasis on personal freedom in performing these prayers suggests that they reflect acts of personal devotion (Reif 1999, p. 351).

Thus, the eighteen can be understood as an early synthesis of personal prayers, clustered around some important themes. The wording of the benedictions, as they were formalised in later tradition, may go back to the time before the first century, as there are close analogies in content and even in shape to prayers in intertestamental literature (2 Mc 1:2-6, 24-29; Sir 36:1-17, 51:11, 12; Instone-Brewer 2004, p. 107).

The eighteen benedictions may also simply be referred to as 'the prayer' *par excellence*. The Mishna supposes that for this prayer one will stand up, which is why it is commonly called the *Amidah* or 'standing prayer' (Ber. V,1). In Jewish tradition, a Babylonian version of these benedictions is commonly used until today, first published in a writ in the Middle Ages (in the Siddur Amram, mentioned before). In 1894, an older text of the *Amidah* was discovered in the Genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, which was



published by Solomon Schechter. This version seems to lack later additions and to better reflect the benedictions as they were prayed in Palestine in the first-century CE, with some adjustments from the period after the destruction of the temple. In the following, this Palestinian version will be taken as the point of departure of the analysis and for some concise quotations (cf. the translation offered by Heinemann 1977, pp. 26–29; Schürer 1979, pp. 460, 461).

The eighteen benedictions are divided into three parts. The first three praise God for who he is. The first one blesses him as ‘the God of our fathers’ (hence its name: 1. *Avot*), the second as the one who produces wonders and makes the dead alive (2. *Gevurot*), and the third one blesses God because he is holy and his name is awesome (3. *Kedusha*). The Mishna refers to these three benedictions under the same names already (Rosh Hash. IV,5).

A second part of the prayer consists of petitions (4–15). God is asked for:

4. knowledge
5. repentance
6. forgiveness
7. redemption
8. healing
9. blessing of years
10. ingathering of the dispersed
11. right judgement
12. wrath for the wicked (for a discussion on the *birkat ha-minim* see Schürer 1979, p. 462)
13. mercy for the righteous
14. (re-)building of Jerusalem and the house of David (the subsequently added prayer for the coming of the Messiah might have ancient roots as well)
15. the hearing of this prayer.

On Sabbath, these petitions are not prayed. Instead, God is praised as Creator by reading Genesis 2:1–3 and some benedictions are said, hallowing the holiness of the Sabbath.

Joseph Heinemann points out the fact that most of the petitions are formulated in one sentence, predominantly divided into two parts, with a certain meter, reflecting a biblical style (Heinemann 1977, p. 234). In some instances, the prayers directly quote a biblical prayer, as the fifth benediction does: ‘Turn us to Thee, O LORD, and we shall return’ (Lm 5:21), and the eighth (slightly altering Jr 17:14): ‘Heal us, O LORD, and we shall be healed’. All prayers of petition end with a blessing that expresses the certainty that God will provide what he is asked for, for example, the conclusion of the fifth: ‘Blessed art Thou who delightest in repentance’, and at the end of the eighth: ‘Blessed art Thou who healest the sick [...]’. Even these prayers as petition remain focused on God as the giver, who is blessed for who he is.

The last three benedictions are called (16) *Avodah* – praying for the continuation or restoration of the temple service, (17) *Hodim* – a thanksgiving for the goodness, grace, and mercies of the LORD as ‘God of our fathers’ (echoing the first blessing) – and (18) *Shalom* – praying for peace and lauding God for his blessing.

The benediction *avodah* was mentioned in Tamid V,1 already, apart from the eighteen. In the Palestinian version of this benediction, God is asked to continue dwelling in Zion, while in the (later) Babylonian prayer God is asked to return to Zion and restore the temple service. Thus, the two versions demonstrate how these prayers could be adjusted to actual needs in the course of time.

It is not difficult to recognise the structure of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples: three benedictions concentrating on the name and the kingdom of God, followed by supplications for communal and personal needs, concluding with thanksgiving and praise. This structure reflects the theological perspective of prayer as *berachah*, as elaborated earlier, and can be recognised in many biblical prayers throughout the OT and the NT. The focus on blessing the LORD is primary and determines the structure and spirit of worship.

## ■ Priestly blessing

Tamid V,1 lends special attention to the priestly blessing as one of the benedictions. From its very beginning, the priestly benediction was intimately connected to the sacrificial cult. The first time Aaron pronounced it, he was standing at the altar (Lv 9:22). In the book of Sirach, the same connection is stressed, as the sons of Aaron bless the people after the presentation of the daily offerings (Sir 50:20, 21; cf. Lk 1:21–22, where Zachariah is also supposed to pronounce the blessing after offering the *Tamid*).

In the Mishna, the difference is stressed between pronouncing the Aaronic blessing in the temple or elsewhere. In the temple, the blessing was to be pronounced without interruption, the holy name could be pronounced as it is written and the priests would raise their hands above their heads, while elsewhere, all this was prohibited (Sotah VII,6). All regulations indicate the strong feeling that the priestly blessing belonged specifically to the sacrificial service in the temple.

After the destruction of the temple, the blessing with the specific words – according to Numbers 6:22–26 provided by God himself – was incorporated in the eighteen benedictions. It is thinkable that before that moment, the exact words of the priestly blessing were not pronounced in synagogues. That could be derived from the practice in Qumran, where a

similar order of prayers is found. There, away from the temple, benedictions were said that echoed words of the priestly blessing in the framework of a prayer (Falk 1999, p. 857; Hammer 1994, p. 318). Similarly, in the synagogue tradition, the last prayer of the eighteen benedictions – for peace – was expanded in a comparable way by adding words that referred to the priestly blessing (Sacks 2009):

Bring peace, goodness, blessing, grace, favor and mercy over us [...] Bless us, our Father, [...] with the light of thy Face. Blessed art Thou, LORD, who blesses thy people Israel with peace. (n.p.)

This could have been prayed originally without an actual blessing by a priest, whereas after the fall of the temple the blessing itself was incorporated in this benediction. Yet it is also feasible that this process had been accomplished already during the Second Temple period, as the Mishna suggests.

Either way, the special relationship between this blessing and the sacrificial cult was kept alive, as only descendants of Aaron were allowed to pronounce it, with a strong awareness of the holiness of the ritual (Elbogen 1993, p. 63).

Addressing God as ‘our Father’ – as in this example – was in fact common in Judaism since ancient times. Already in Qumran, God is invoked in this way, sometimes even more personally as ‘my Father’ (4Q372:16; Falk 1999, p. 875). Thus, humility and audacity always come together in Jewish prayer throughout history (Heinemann 1977, p. 249).

## ■ Conclusion

Studying the shape and content of Jewish liturgy in the time of the NT appears to face several challenges. There is a danger of drawing anachronistic conclusions from the perspectives of later Jewish or Christian traditions. Yet, by examining rabbinic traditions and comparing them to contemporary literary sources, evidence can be given that pivotal parts of the later-developed Jewish liturgy were commonly accepted in the time of Jesus or before. In the first-century CE there was a set daily liturgy, in which the Ten Commandments (Dt 5), the *Shema* (Dt 6), an organised cycle of Scripture readings from the Torah and the Prophets, blessings, supplications and thanksgiving, as well as the priestly blessing, had received a commonly accepted position.

From the beginning, Jewish liturgy developed in close connection to what happened in the temple. Prayer accompanied the sacrificial cult. After the destruction of the temple, this close connection was maintained. Prayers that originally went with the sacrificial cult became a kind of continuation of the sacrifices themselves. The service, *avodah*, within the

temple was continued as a service of the hearts of those praying, offering these prayers as sacrifices of their lips. This resulted in a democratisation of the *avodah*, by which Jewish worship could survive after the loss of its central location. At the same time, this permanently coloured the content of worship as prayer. The heart of the worshipper is focused on offering praise to God, which is typically shaping Jewish prayer as blessing God. The focus is more on giving than on receiving, more on God than on the one who prays, even in those prayers where the worshipper does ask for favour and mercy. Because of the certainty that God will accept these offerings, prayer provides the worshipper with a new, theological perspective on every aspect of life, receiving back what has been offered to God.

Apart from this movement of bringing the essence of the sacrificial cult into everyday worship outside the temple as well, a second movement could be discerned. Prayers that were expressed as personal acts of devotion were formalised and incorporated into this same communal worship. Thus, the liturgy could respond to changing personal challenges and maintain continuity with the worshipping community throughout the ages.

The impetus for prayer and worship remained the word of God, which should be heard (the *Shema*) and praised with words given by himself. Thus, in Jewish tradition, it is primarily not religious experience that brings to prayer, but obedience to the Torah, which asks for prayer as an offering to God, which in its turn shapes religious experience.

All these aspects are of eminent relevance for the reader of the NT. The focus on doxology and the theological perspective that it provides, the liturgical centrality of the temple, with its set 'times of prayer', as well as the reading practice of the Torah with its accompanying readings from the Prophets is shared by the first followers of Jesus, all being Jewish and raised within this liturgical context. The content, focus, structure and address of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples reflects common Jewish practice. Similarly, the idea that worship as prayer cannot be separated from listening to the Torah and putting it into practice in acts of loving kindness is a common feature of early Jewish and early Christian 'service of the heart'.



# Prayer in the Synoptic Gospels

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## ■ Introduction

Prayer forms a crucial part of Jesus' praxis and teaching in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus is depicted as a pious Jew who continuously prayed. He often withdrew to lonely places to pray, but also spent much time in the temple and synagogue. He prayed at the critical moments of his life. Besides setting an example, Jesus also, in many ways, taught his disciples how to pray.

In the gospels, Jesus' prayer life is seen as example to follow, his teachings to be obeyed and he himself to be honoured. The gospels present Jesus as the ideal figure in contrast to other Jewish leaders.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Reading the gospels as first-century Mediterranean 'bioi' or 'vitae' [biographies] helps to appreciate the working of these texts. Biographies were often used to form the identity of a specific group and its distinctiveness from other groups (Viljoen 2018, pp. 95-96). It would describe the honourable life and teaching of the founding figures. Such figures were depicted as examples to honour or imitate and the inappropriate practices and behaviours of outside groups were often mentioned to substantiate the distinctive practices of the inside group (Carter 2000, pp. 9-11). The teachings and practices of rabbis were also common learning modes in Jewish tradition. Paul, for example, remarks: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Cor 11:1).

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In this chapter, subsequent prayer texts in Mark, Matthew and Luke<sup>2</sup> are investigated respectively. This is done in a running commentary style, though without extensive exegetical detail because of the limitation of space. A brief summary of the main findings is presented after the discussion of each respective gospel. In the final section, an overarching theological reflection is given of prayer in the Synoptic Gospels.

## ■ Mark

Mark offers less material on prayer than in other Synoptic Gospels. However, it seems that prayer and faith play central roles in this gospel, though limited space is devoted to prayer (Dowd 1988).<sup>3</sup>

Mark explicitly mentions only three occasions where Jesus had prayed, though his gesture with the feeding miracles implies a prayer (Mk 6:41 & 8:6-7) and he addresses God in his last words on the cross (Mk 14:34). The first of the explicit references occurs at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Mk 1:35), the second in the middle (Mk 6:46) and the third at the end of his ministry (Mk 14:32-42). The first and third form an 'inclusio' of Jesus' ministry. This suggests that Jesus was in constant communion with God throughout his ministry (Nygaard 2012, p. 75). In all three accounts, Jesus withdraws from others to be alone in prayer. Beyond these renderings of Jesus at prayer, Mark, in several places, deals implicitly with the theme of prayer, which is also dealt with in this section on prayer in Mark. Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer by example and instruction.

### ■ Early morning in a solitary place (Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16)

Mark's first rendering of Jesus at prayer occurs at the beginning of Jesus ministry amidst a series of healing miracles. Many people gathered to find him: *καὶ πρῶτὸ ἔννεχα λίαν ἀναστὰς ἐξῆλθεν καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς ἔρημον τόπον, κακεῖ προσήύχετο* [and rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed] (Mk 1:35). Jesus transcended the normal Jewish way of praying. He did not only pray at home or in the synagogue but went out into lonely places to be alone with his father.

Jesus needs to be alone with God during a busy time of his ministry with many people gathering around him. In prayer, he personally relates

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2. This investigation is conducted without attending to questions of dependence or sources, though parallels are indicated and briefly discussed where applicable.

3. Dowd (1988) explores the relation between prayer, faith, miracles and suffering in the First Gospel.

with God as the source of the power and authority for his ministry. He prays for divine guidance and support (Collins 2007, p. 177). The remark that Jesus went out while it was still dark suggests that he maintained regular Jewish prayer times, and the imperfect verb [ἐξῆλθεν] denotes a significant period of prayer. However, Jesus is depicted as being more ‘pious’ than his followers, as they were still sleeping.

## ■ Blessing at feeding miracles (Mk 6:41; 8:6–7; Mt 14:19, 15:36; Lk 9:16)

With the instigation of the first feeding miracle to feed the 5,000, Mark 6 mentions:

[T]aking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to Heaven and said a blessing [ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εὐλόγησεν] and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. (v. 41)<sup>4</sup>

Looking up is a clear prayer gesture (Culpepper 2007, p. 211).<sup>5</sup> This suggests the custom of a Jewish head of house offering prayers before a meal (Dt 8:10; see also m. Ber 6:1, ‘Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth’ and b. Ber 35a, ‘It is forbidden to man to enjoy anything belonging to this world without a blessing’).<sup>6</sup> Again Jesus should be seen as following proper Jewish praxis at the beginning of a meal (Collins 2007, p. 325). With the first feeding miracle, Jesus looked up to Heaven and praised God (εὐλόγησεν, Mk 6:41); but with the second miracle, no mention is made of him looking up. In this case, he gave thanks (εὐχαριστήσας, Mk 8:6). The former verb is used at the Last Supper when Jesus took the bread (λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐλόγησας, Mk 14:22) and the latter when taking the cup (λαβὼν ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας, Mk 14:23).<sup>7</sup>

## ■ Praying up the mountainside (Mk 6:46; Mt 14:23)

Directly after the first feeding miracle (Mk 6:30–44) and as part of the subsequent scene in which Jesus walks on the water (Mk 6:45–52), we read, ‘ἀποταξάμενος αὐτοῖς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι’ [after he had left

4. In all the Synoptic accounts of the feeding miracles, Jesus pronounces a blessing.

5. Jesus repeats this gesture when healing the deaf and dumb man (Mk 7:32–34). While Jesus gazed at the heavens, he sighed [ἐστέναξεν]. Such relation between prayer and sighing also occurs in Romans 8:22–27.

6. In Luke 24:30–31, the risen Lord is recognised by this gesture.

7. By doing so, Jesus follows the basic customs of prayer during the Hallel. Similar language is found in Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24, which signifies the development of a liturgical formula in the early church.



them, he went up on the mountain to pray] (Mk 6:46). Jesus' ascension of the mountain reminds of Moses who ascended the mountain for communion with the Lord (cf. Ex 24).<sup>8</sup>

Though the words of Jesus' prayer are not mentioned in Mark 6:46, the event implies communion between the Father and Jesus, his son.

## ■ A kind of healing, only by prayer (Mk 9:29)

Mark does not record any event of the disciples praying with Jesus, yet he records Jesus calling his disciples to pray. In the scene where the disciples could not heal the demoniac boy (Mk 9:14–32), the boy's father approaches Jesus for help (Mk 9:22). Though it is not explicitly stated as a prayer towards Jesus, it is implied: 'But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us' [ἀλλ' εἴ τι δύνη, βοήθησον ἡμῖν σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς] (Mk 9:21).<sup>9</sup> Jesus responds by healing the boy. When the disciples then ask why they were not able to do so, Jesus responds with 'this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer' [εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ] (Mk 9:29).<sup>10</sup> Jesus teaches his disciples that they do not have the power to heal in themselves. They only exercise God's power, and for that reason they need to ask him for it. In the parallel passage in Matthew 17, Jesus does refer to prayer, but remarks:

[/]f you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you. (v. 21)

People who trust in their own power to perform God's work trust in themselves and not in God. That implies a lack of true faith. Faith, prayer and God's power are interlinked.

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8. Occasions of Jesus going up the mountainside are also mentioned in Mark 3:13–19; 9:2–8. Ascending mountains symbolically suggest being closer to God (Levine & Witherington 2018, p. 260; cf. e.g. Ex 19:16–19; 34:2–9; 1 Ki 19:11–13).

9. In Mark's narrative, various other characters approach Jesus to ask for help, and when they do so, Jesus helps them. However, prayer language is not explicitly used. While Jesus was asleep during the storm on the sea, his disciples cried out, 'Teacher, don't you care that we are drowning?' (Mk 4:38), yet more explicit language is used in the parallel text in Matthew 8:25, 'Lord, save us! We are going to drown!' Later in the narrative, the Syro-Phoenician woman begs Jesus to drive out a demon from her daughter (Mk 7:26). Some people begged Jesus to heal a deaf and blind man (Mk 8:32).

10. Some manuscripts add 'and fasting' after 'prayer' in Mark 9:29. However, the text evidence for its omission is stronger (κ\*, B, k, geo, Clement).

## ■ A house of prayer (Mk 11:17; Mt 21:13; Lk 19:46) and teaching on prayer (Mk 11:24–25; Mt 11:22)

Jesus' teaching on prayer in Mark 11:22–25 concludes the scenes of Jesus' clearing the temple<sup>11</sup> and the cursing of the fig tree<sup>12</sup> (Mk 11:12–21). In these scenes, Jesus criticises the improper practises in the temple.<sup>13</sup> He refers to Isaiah 56:7 (with an allusion to Jr 7:11) and states that the temple should be a 'house of prayer' [οἶκος προσευχῆς] for all nations,<sup>14</sup> without any mention that it should be a place of sacrifices (Mk 11:17). Though sacrifice is a form of prayer, only prayer is mentioned, which signifies a shift from sacrifice to prayer.<sup>15</sup> This critique stands in the context of the cursing of the fig tree, which functions as an enacted parable (Culpepper 2007, p. 374).<sup>16</sup> In the Old Testament (OT), Israel is depicted as a fig tree, and its judgement, because of their lack of fruit, as the withering of such trees (cf. Jr 8:13; Hs 2:12; 9:10, 16; Jl 1:7; Mi 7:1–6) (Nygaard 2012, p. 85). Prayer forms a key part of a fruitful life and an expression of faith. The cursing of the fig tree symbolises the fact that the temple no longer functions as it should as a 'house of prayer'.<sup>17</sup>

The theme of prayer is continued in the rest of the scene (Mk 11:22–25).<sup>18</sup> Jesus indicates that the temple building and its establishment would no longer function as the actual place of prayer. His disciples would take over

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11. The temple played an important role in the life of Jesus as he spent much of his time in both the temple and synagogue. At twelve years old, he amazed the rabbinic teachers in the temple (Lk 2:47). He called the temple 'my Father's house' (Lk 2:43) and expected his parents to know that he was there. During the Second Temple period, the temple stood central to Jewish life and worship. The Jewish people practised *Avodah* [acts of service and worship of God] in their daily lives, while prayer formed a critical part of this *Avodah*. Priests and Levites led them in worship and prayers (Finkel 2001, pp. 44–46).

12. This negative miracle of the cursing of the fig tree is the only miracle recounted to take place in Jerusalem. This miracle is recounted by Mark and Matthew but not by Luke.

13. Later in the narrative, the tearing of the Temple curtain (Mk 15:38) indicates that the traditional temple service was replaced by a new form of worship, as inaugurated in Jesus (Osborne 2010, p. 244).

14. Besides the temple, numerous synagogues existed in the time of Jesus, in Jerusalem and throughout Judea and Galilee (Safrai 1987, pp. 909–913). While priests and Levites performed cultic activities in the temple, lay elders led the synagogues. Prayers also formed an essential element in the synagogal service as the earliest term for a synagogue (third-century BC) is οἶκος προσευχῆς [house of prayer] (Osborne 2010, p. 245).

15. The Gospels nowhere record that Jesus or his disciples participated in the sacrifices of the temple. They probably participated in the external life of the temple. Jesus' parents did participate in sacrifices (Lk 2:24).

16. The acting out of parables places Jesus in the tradition of Israel's prophets. Isaiah, for example, walked naked and barefoot through Jerusalem (Is 20:2–4) and Jeremiah hid a loincloth at the Euphrates (Jr 13:1–11).

17. While Matthew also mentions the cursing of the fig tree and Jesus' teaching on prayer in this context, it is significant that Luke, who otherwise deals extensively with prayer material, does not.

18. Matthew 11:22–25 contains a parallel of this teaching, while Luke does not.

that function. Jesus recommences the argument on the interrelation between prayer, faith and miracles in Mark 9:29. Jesus states, 'πάντα ὅσα προσεύχεσθε καὶ αἰτεῖσθε, πιστεύετε ὅτι ἐλάβετε, καὶ ἔσται ὑμῖν' [whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours] (Mk 11:24). Power to conduct extraordinary deeds does not reside in the disciples themselves, but with God.<sup>19</sup> This continues Jesus' call to "Ἐχετε πίστιν θεοῦ" [have faith in God] (Mk 11:22). Besides faith, in Mark 11, Jesus also emphasises the importance of forgiveness in prayer:

[W]henever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone (ἀφίετε εἴ τι ἔχετε κατὰ τινος), so that your father also who is in Heaven may forgive you (ἀφῆ ὑμῖν) your trespasses. (v. 26)<sup>20</sup>

Forgiveness forms as central an element in prayer as it does in the sacrificial system of the temple. Furthermore, in prayer, God can be regarded as 'ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς' [your father in Heaven] (Mk 11:26).<sup>21</sup> Those who pray can experience God as a loving and forgiving father. While Jesus is the Father's son, his followers may also know and address him as their father (Nygaard 2012, p. 88).

## ■ Warning against praying with pretence (Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47)

In Mark 12:40, Jesus warns against the conduct of the scribes who, 'for pretence make long prayers' [μακρὰ προσευχόμενοι]. This follows Jesus' condemnation of a series of their practises in order to gain public recognition (Mk 12:38-39). The offence is not that they made long prayers but that they abused them as instruments to gain status by pretending to be very pious.<sup>22</sup> In such cases, those who pray have human listeners rather the God in mind. People who pray like this are warned that they will suffer greater condemnation [περισσότερον κρίμα].

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19. Jesus' confirmation must be qualified within the broader context of Mark. All things are possible for God, but one has to submit to the plan of God. This fact is symbolised by Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, where he submitted to the will of his Father.

20. Jesus' instruction to forgive when praying is also found in Matthew 6:12, 14 and Luke 11:4.

21. The expression 'your Father in heaven' occurs *only* here in Mark but *often* in Matthew.

22. In a similar context in Matthew, Jesus accuses the Pharisees: 'They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long' (Mt 23:5). Matthew 6:7 has a similar warning where they are depicted as 'hypocrites'.

## ■ Prayer in times of hardship (Mk 13:18; Mt 24:20; Lk 21:36)

In Mark's eschatological speech in which he uses traditional apocalyptic language (Mk 13),<sup>23</sup> Jesus admonishes his disciples, 'προσεύχεσθε δὲ ἵνα μὴ γένηται χειμῶνος' [pray that this will not take place in winter] (Mk 13:18), a warning similar to what is found in Matthew 24:20 and Luke 21:36 (Viljoen 2002, p. 460). When suffering hardship, Jesus' disciples should pray. Within this eschatological context they should not, in the first place, pray that these hardships be removed, as the future is in the hands of God, but to persevere in times of trial.

## ■ Praying in Gethsemane (Mk 14:32-42; Mt 26:36-36; Lk 22:39-46)

In the Gethsemane scene (Mk 14:32-42), the depictions of Jesus at prayer are extensive in comparison to the previous two scenes (Mk 1:35 and 6:46) where no indication of the contents and results of his prayers are given. This scene describes Jesus at prayer and the result of his prayer, while it also includes explicit prayer-teaching.

In contrast to the Maccabean hero Eleazar (2 Macc 6:30), Socrates (Plato Phaedo 117c-118) and Seneca (Tacitus Annals 15.60-64) who bravely faced death, Mark, like Matthew, mentions Jesus' grief at what lies ahead, 'Περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕως θανάτου' [My soul is very sorrowful, even to death] (Mk 14:34), emotions also found in Psalms 41:6, 12, and 43:5.<sup>24</sup> He also falls to the ground.

Jesus uses the prayer-address 'Ἀββᾶ ὁ Πατήρ' [Abba, Father] (Mk 14:36), which displays his sonship to the Father.<sup>25</sup> In his prayer, Jesus draws on the psalmic language of piety, especially found in psalms of lament, 'πάντα δυνατά σοι· παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ· ἀλλ' οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σύ' [all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will] (Mk 14:36) (cf. Ps 30:8-10; 40:11-13; 42:9-11; 43:1-2, 5; 55:4-8; 61:1-3; 116:3-4). This prayer consists of four parts, namely, an

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23. Jesus' eschatological teaching in Mark 13 is similar to Matthew 24-25, but shorter. It seems that the historical context of the destruction of Jerusalem and the apocalyptic context of the coming of the Son of Man are intermingled in this passage (Culpepper 2007, p. 461).

24. This is the first time in Mark that Jesus is portrayed as distressed.

25. This is the only occurrence of the Aramaic word 'Abba' in the gospels. It probably expresses the intensity of Jesus' prayer (Collins 2007, p. 679).

invocation, a confession of God's sovereign power,<sup>26</sup> a petition of deliverance and submission to God's will<sup>27</sup> (Culpepper 2007, pp. 502–504).

The outcome of this scene expresses the idea of complete obedience and trust that God will eventually steer events toward the best, 'ἀπέχει ἤλθεν ἡ ὥρα, ἰδοὺ παραδίδοται ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰς τὰς χεῖρας τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν. ἐγείρεσθε ἄγωμεν· ἰδοὺ ὁ παραδιδούς με ἤγγικεν' [It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand] (Mk 14:41b–42). Through prayer, Jesus has prepared himself for the suffering that lies ahead (Culpepper 2007, p. 499).

Besides the rendering of Jesus' own prayer, Mark also mentions Jesus' instruction to his disciples to 'γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ ἔλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν· τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον, ἡ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής' [Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.<sup>28</sup> The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak] (Mk 14:38). To watch<sup>29</sup> and pray is essential when a crisis in which one's faith is tested is imminent. However, the disciples disappoint as they fall asleep. Their failure stands in sharp contrast to the faithfulness of Jesus.

## ■ Jesus' last words on the cross (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46)

On the cross 'ἐβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, 'Ἐλωὶ Ἐλωὶ λαμὰ σαβαχθανεΐ'; [Jesus cried out with a loud voice My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?] (Mk 15:34). In this cry of abandonment, Jesus employs language from a psalm of lament (Ps 22:1). In Gethsemane, he addressed God as 'Abba', but now as 'My God' ['Ἐλωὶ']. Though this sigh of Jesus is not depicted as a prayer, it does express his anguish and struggle to which he committed himself at the beginning of the passion (Mk 14:36). In light of God's absence, Jesus' cry maintains a one-sided engagement with God and expression of his anguish.

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26. This statement recalls Jesus' instruction to his disciples on prayer (Mk 11:22b–24).

27. Jesus' submission to God's will stands in sharp contrast to the self-seeking attitude of his disciples in Mark 10:35–45.

28. The warning not to fall into temptation reminds us of the petition in the Lord's prayer (Mt 6:13 and Lk 11:4).

29. In Mark 14:32, Jesus has also instructed the three to stay vigilant: 'remain here and watch'.

## ■ Summary

Mark's teaching on prayer is mostly implicit and forms an integrated part of the narrative. The evangelist only offers a concise depiction of Jesus at prayer and a limited number of words he uttered in prayer. However, teaching on prayer does exist: firstly by the example of Jesus, and secondly through Jesus' instruction.

As stated, three explicit scenes with Jesus praying occur: firstly, at the beginning of his ministry (Mk 1:35); secondly, in the middle (Mk 6:46); and thirdly, at the end (Mk 14:32–42). In all three scenes, Jesus withdraws from others to be alone and pray. Only in the last scene are the words of Jesus' prayer given (Mk 14:36). The contents of this prayer are reiterated by the statement that he prayed the same again (Mk 14:39). Obedience and faithfulness to the will of God is emphasised as the outcome of his prayer in Gethsemane (Mk 14:36). This prayer serves as a model with its four parts, namely of invocation, confession of God's sovereign power, petition and submission to God's will.

Beyond these three explicit references to Jesus at prayer, Jesus makes gestures of prayers during the feeding miracles and when he speaks to God on the cross. Jesus' prayers draw on Jewish piety as he prays the Hallel after the Passover meal (Mk 14:23–24) and uses prayer language from the Psalms (e.g. Mk 14:32–42; 15:34).

Mark portrays Jesus as the unique son who continually approaches God as his father in prayer. He addresses God as *Abba* 'Father' (Mk 14:36). In his prayer-teaching, Jesus assures his disciples that their Father in Heaven will listen to them (Mk 11:25). This new relation between God and humans is brought about in Jesus. God can only be accessed by a person who enjoys a relationship with God as established by Jesus (Nygaard 2012, p. 106).

Prayer and faith are inseparable. Sincere prayer requires faith in God (Mk 11:22). Faith is directed to God, though implicitly also to Jesus. Though Mark does not recount explicit devotion directed to Jesus, implicit hints of devotion to Jesus do occur from characters who seek help from him.

The power of God becomes available through prayer (Mk 9:29; 11:20–25). Through prayer, Jesus' disciples participate in his ministry, authority and power.

Prayer has an eschatological perspective expressing the expectation of the return of the Son of Man (Mk 13:1–37). It expresses the tension between the present and the coming age. In this age, humans experience a continuous battle against evil forces. Therefore, they need to pray to endure temptation. Prayer keeps them standing in times of trial. While the 'flesh' is tempted by evil, the 'spirit' can pray and display faith (Mk 14:38).

## ■ Matthew

Matthew is distinct among the canonical gospels for its five extensive teaching discourses (cf. Mt 5:1-7:29; 10:1-11:1; 13:1-53; 18:1-35; 24:1-25:46). This includes an extensive teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, yet Jesus teaches and instructs on prayer beyond this sermon. Matthew also depicts Jesus as one who earnestly and frequently prays himself. Jesus exemplifies his own teaching on prayer.

### ■ The temptation of Jesus (Mt 4:9-10; Lk 4:7-8)<sup>30</sup>

In the temptation scene (Mt 4:1-11),<sup>31</sup> the devil tempts Jesus to bow down and worship him [πεσῶν προσκυνήσης, Mt 4:9].<sup>32</sup> Jesus rebukes the devil and recites the *Shema*, “Ὑπαγε, Σατανᾶ· γέγραπται γάρ Κύριον τὸν θεὸν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις” [Go away, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God and him only shall you serve] (Mt 4:10).<sup>33</sup> This use of the *Shema* sets the theocentric agenda for the prayer-teaching that follows in the rest of the gospel.<sup>34</sup>

### ■ Prayer-teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:5-14; Lk 11:2-4)

With the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), Jesus teaches his disciples how to live a better, righteous life (Mt 5:20; cf. Viljoen 2018, pp. 93-131). In appropriation of this life, prayer plays a crucial role (Nygaard 2012, p. 30). This becomes apparent from the prominent position of prayer in this teaching. Some scholars argue that the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:9-13) forms the conceptual centre of the Sermon on the Mount (e.g. Luz 2007, p. 254). Kiley (1994, p. 15) regards ‘select sayings in the sermon as a commentary on the prayer’, while Bornkamm (1978, pp. 419-432) opines that Matthew 6:19-7:11 forms an interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>35</sup>

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30. The temptation scene occurs in all three Synoptic Gospels, but the Markan account (Mk 1:12-13) has no dialogue between Jesus and Satan.

31. The temptation follows Jesus’ 40 days of fasting (Mt 4:2). Jesus is paralleled with Moses and Elijah who both fasted for 40 days (Ex 24:18; 34:28; Dt 9:9-11; 10:10; 1 Ki 19:8). Other than Jesus, the Israelites bowed down before false gods in the wilderness (Ex 32).

32. Luke places the temptation to worship the devil second (Lk 4:5-8), while in Matthew, the temptation to worship the devil forms the scene’s climax.

33. Jesus in Matthew 4:10 uses προσκυνέω and λατρεύω as found in the LXX version of Deuteronomy 6:13.

34. The *Shema* (Dt 6:4) encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Israel’s religion.

35. Bornkamm (1978, pp. 419-432) argues that Matthew 6:19-24 elaborates on the first three petitions, 6:25-34 refers to the fourth petition, 7:1-5 the petition of forgiveness, 7:6 the sixth and seventh petitions and that 7:7-11 forms the conclusion to the teaching on prayer.

Prayer implies a dear and intimate relation between God and those who pray, as expressed in Jesus' instruction to address God as Father (cf. Mt 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 6, 8).<sup>36</sup> Yet, human sonship depends on a relationship with Jesus as Son of God. The Lord's Prayer is given in a corporate (family) context as it consists of 'we-petitions' rather than 'I-petitions'.

This prayer provides a model for a prayer in which the faith community expresses its total dependence on God. The first three petitions concern God and his holiness and kingdom, and a second three the needs of those who pray. The prayer begins with God-centred petitions ('your name', 'your kingdom come' and 'your will'; Mt 6:9b-10a). God's honour should be the community's first priority. These petitions are followed by intercessory prayer ('give us', 'forgive us' and 'lead us'; Mt 6:11-13). With these petitions, the faith community surrenders itself for all its needs to God. The order is important: the honour of God should be believers' priority, while personal concerns are subordinate towards serving him. Obviously, these petitions do not provide a detailed list of all the things one ought to pray for but an outline of how to pray.

The Lord's Prayer is imbedded in a broader discussion of the three basic elements of contemporary Jewish piety (Tob 12:8; cf. Viljoen 2018, pp. 123-126), namely, almsgiving (Mt 6:2-5), prayer (Mt 6:5-15) and fasting (Mt 6:16-18).<sup>37</sup> While Matthew 5:20 deals with the nature of true righteousness in general, Matthew 6:1 warns against the pitfalls of practising insincere righteousness (Viljoen 2018, p. 123). When praying, Jesus' disciples should not do it like the 'hypocrites'<sup>38</sup> who pray in order to impress their observers (Mt 6:5). The problem with the hypocrites was not that they did not perform these acts, but that they performed them in order to make a show of it. Their intention was to enhance their own reputation before a human audience. Furthermore, they should not pray like the 'pagans' who keep on babbling [βατταλογήσητε] and using many words or mindless repetition [τῆ πολυλογίᾳ] (Mt 6:7), probably directed towards a variety of gods in the hope that someone would listen. God is one, and prayer is not intended to tell him what he does not know, as he knows what his children need even before they ask (Mt 6:8).<sup>39</sup> The words 'Προσευχόμενοι δὲ' [but when you

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36. While the relation between Jesus and the Father is unique, through Jesus the Son, his disciples can also know God as their father.

37. These three examples were central to Jewish piety during the Second Temple period (between 516 BCE and 70 CE) when the Second Temple of Jerusalem existed.

38. The word ὑποκριταὶ was commonly used for actors who consciously performed in a play (Batey 1971, p. 563; Witherington 2006, p. 141). Acting like hypocrites implies that prayer is used in seeking public adoration within an honour and shame culture (Viljoen 2018, p. 125).

39. An allusion to Isaiah 65:24, repeated in Matthew 6:32b.



pray] (Mt 6:7) suggest the distinctness of both the Gentile and Jewish forms of prayer (Davies & Allison 2004a, p. 587).

In Matthew 7:7-11, Jesus continues his teaching on prayer. He reiterates his previous statement that God knows the needs of his people and hears their prayers (Mt 6:8-9), a confirmation which draws on the OT depiction of God (cf. Is 65:24; Jr 29:13; Pr 8:17). In Verse 7, the act of praying is expressed with three present tense imperatives ‘αἰτεῖτε, ζητεῖτε, κρούετε’ [ask, seek, knock],<sup>40</sup> which signifies continuous pleading with God by those who realise their continuing needs. The teaching concludes with a confirmation that God will answer (Mt 7:11): ‘How much more will your father who is in Heaven give good things?’ This implies that God will provide what is good and not whatever people ask for.

### ■ Prayer for God’s mission (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2b)

Matthew 9:35-38 describes the missionary task of Jesus and his disciples, followed by Matthew 10, in which Jesus commissions the Twelve. While Jesus calls his disciples to be co-workers in his missionary task, he calls them to pray, ‘δεήθητε οὖν τοῦ Κυρίου τοῦ θερισμοῦ ὅπως ἐκβάλῃ ἐργάτας εἰς τὸν θερισμὸν αὐτοῦ’ [therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest] (Mt 9:38). Prayer forms the foundation of the disciples’ missionary task (Luz 2001, p. 65). Through prayer, they share God’s urgency in pursuing his missionary plan.

### ■ Praise for God’s revelation to Jesus’ disciples (Mt 11:25b-26; Lk 10:21)

Matthew 11:25b-26 records a spontaneous prayer of praise by Jesus: ‘Ἐξομολογοῦμαι σοι, Πάτερ, Κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἔκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν, καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις. ναί, ὁ Πατήρ, ὅτι οὕτως εὐδοκία ἐγένετο ἔμπροσθέν σου’ [‘I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will’]. This prayer once again expresses the intimate relationship between Jesus and his father while acknowledging the absolute sovereignty of God’s love and will. Jesus associates directly with the Father, whom he knows. He thanks God for the gift of revelation that his disciples have received (Viljoen 2018, pp. 215-218). Jesus’ role as a Revealer correlates with that of the Father, as the good will [εὐδοκία] of God to reveal

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40. ‘Asking, seeking and knocking’ are Jewish expressions of prayer (cf. Is 55:6; Jr 29:13-14).

[ἀπεκάλυψας] (Mt 11:25–26) stands in parallel to Jesus' will [βούληται] to reveal [ἀποκαλύψαι] (Mt 11:27) (Nygaard 2012, p. 47).

## ■ Prayer with two feeding miracles (Mt 14:19; Mk 6:41; Lk 9:16 and Mt 15:36; Mk 8:6–7)

Jesus prays according to common Jewish custom during the two recorded feeding miracles. With the first miracle, Matthew briefly mentions that Jesus looked up to Heaven and offered a blessing (ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εὐλόγησεν, Mt 14:19) before handing out the five loaves and the two fish. Looking up is an external sign of internal dependence (Davies & Allison 2004b, p. 490) and a customary word of praise (Luz 2001, p. 314). With the second feeding miracle, Matthew records that he gave thanks (εὐχαριστήσας, Mt 15:36)<sup>41</sup> before handing out the seven loaves and a few small fish. In both these cases, Jesus does what the head of a Jewish household would have done with a meal (Witherington 2006, p. 288).

## ■ Prayer on a mountain before walking on water (Mt 14:23; Mk 6:46)

Although the reference to Jesus' prayer – ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος κατ' ἰδίαν προσεύξασθαι [he went up on the mountain by himself to pray] (Mt 14:23) – does not form a major part in the scene of him walking on the water (Mt 14:23–33), it does present Jesus as a character of great piety. Like Moses at Sinai, Jesus climbs up a mountain to be with God (cf. Mt 17:1–8 and 28:16). He does this without his disciples in order to be alone with his father (cf. Mt 6:5–6).

Jesus' prayer serves as a pointer toward his source of power and authority, as is revealed in the further development of the scene and in the disciples' imminent confession (Davies & Allison 2004b, p. 502). The scene unfolds with the disciples in the boat struggling against the strong wind, Jesus walking on the water, Peter rescued from sinking, and the stilling of the wind. Jesus' act of walking on the water reveals his identity, for in the OT it is only God who walks on water (Job 9:8; see also Ps 77:19; Hab 3:15). His identity is confirmed by the confession of the disciples, 'Truly you are the Son of God' (Mt 14:33), which forms the climax of the scene. This forms the first instance in Matthew where humans fall down to worship Jesus.

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41. Similar wording is used by Mark, Luke and Paul (Mk 14:23; 22:17; 1 Cor 11:24).

## ■ Prayer by the disciplining community (Mt 18:19–20)

Jesus' ecclesiological discourse (Mt 18:1–35) includes an instruction on prayer: 'ἐὰν δύο συμφωνήσωσιν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς περὶ παντὸς πράγματος οὗ ἐὰν αἰτήσωνται, γενήσεται αὐτοῖς παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς, οὗ γὰρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἕμὸν ὄνομα, ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν' [if two of you agree on Earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my father in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them] (Mt 18:19–20). This reference to prayer follows a section that deals with discipline by the community of a member who sins. This instruction expands the promise of the authority that was given to Peter in Matthew 16:9 to a body of leaders of the congregation (ἐκκλησία, Mt 18:17). Matthew 18:16 and 19 mention the need for two or three witnesses, a Jewish custom established in Deuteronomy 19:15.<sup>42</sup>

Prayer forms a crucial part of this discipline, as the community cannot function of its own accord. The community that disciplines the wrongdoer acts as representatives of the Father in Heaven. The church's decision should be guided by God, while the 'two or three' is related to the witnesses of the misconduct (Mt 18:16).

God's presence is experienced in corporate prayer, and it should lead the church in doing God's will. A strong Christological claim is made by the statement that Jesus is present with those who pray. The motif of the presence of Christ appears at several places in Matthew (Mt 1:23; 28:20). Jesus, who founded the community (Mt 16:18), stays with it as exalted Lord (Luz 2001, p. 459). The community should submit themselves to his guidance and teaching (Witherington 2006, p. 351). This forms an implicit confirmation of Jesus' divinity. Osborne (2010, p. 249) remarks that this implies that every church decision should be taken in prayer and be done in Jesus' name.

## ■ Prayer for the children (Mt 19:13)

While all the Synoptic Gospels describe the scene of little children brought to Jesus (Mk 10:13–16; Mt 19:13–15; Lk 18:15–17), only Matthew explicitly mentions the request that he should lay his hands and pray [ἵνα τὰς χεῖρας ἐπιθῇ αὐτοῖς καὶ προσεύξηται] for them (Mt 19:13). While the children have been considered unimportant and even a nuisance by the disciples, Jesus places his hands on them. Laying on of hands was normally associated

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42. 'A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established' (Dt 19:15).

with healing. Though no mention is made of the words spoken by Jesus, the laying on of his hands signifies his blessing of the children.

### ■ **The temple as a house of Prayer (Mt 21:13; Mk 11:17; Lk 19:46), cursing of the fig tree and teaching on prayer (Mt 21:22; Mk 11:24–25)**

The cleansing of the temple is recounted in all the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 11:12–24; Mt 21:12–22; Lk 19:45–48), while the accompanying cursing of the fig tree is told only in Mark and Matthew. As in Mark, prayer is mentioned in both these scenes. In this enacted parable, Jesus refers to the temple as a house of prayer and on the second day commences with the cursing of the fig tree, followed by explicit prayer-teaching. Jesus criticises the temple practises by echoing OT terminology: ‘Ὁ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται, ὑμεῖς δὲ αὐτὸν ποιεῖτε σπήλαιον ληστῶν’ [My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers].<sup>43</sup>

The narrative of the temple cleansing and its designation as a ‘house of prayer’ continues with the fig tree scene and Jesus’ teaching, which suggests that the misconduct by the religious leaders leads toward a ceasing of the temple practice and will be replaced by the faithful prayers of his followers. The whole episode concludes with, ‘πάντα ὅσα ἂν αἰτήσητε ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ πιστεύοντες λήμψεσθε’ [whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith] (Mt 21:22). Matthew teaches that faith is an absolute requirement to receive answers to prayer (Mt 21:21–22) (Nygaard 2012, p. 47).<sup>44</sup>

### ■ **Prayer in the eschatological discourse (Mt 24:20; Mk 13:18; Lk 21:36)**

The eschatological discourse (Mt 24–25) offers teaching for a time of serious distress. Within this discourse, brief reference is made to prayer. At the appearance of the ‘abomination of desolation’, the people must flee (Mt 24:15). They must pray that it should not occur in winter or on a Sabbath.<sup>45</sup> Significantly, no advice is given to pray that it should not happen, as it must happen: δεῖ γὰρ γενέσθαι [it must happen] (Mt 24:6). It is ordained by God.

43. The first part is a precise quote from Isaiah 56:7, minus ‘for all gentiles’ (which Mark does include), and the second part is from Jeremiah 7:11 (see also Mt 1:10; Hs 9:15).

44. This reiterates the prayer teaching found in Matthew 7:7–11.

45. The Sabbath is not mentioned in Mark.

## ■ The Last Supper (Mt 26:26–27; Mk 14:22–23)

Similar to what Jesus had done during the two feeding miracles, he gives thanks for the bread [εὐλογίσας]<sup>46</sup> and the cup [εὐχαριστήσας] at the Last Supper (Mt 26:26–27). Once more, this action can be seen as prayer. The language reminds of a Jewish meal. This occasion developed into a rite in the early Christian community (cf. 1 Cor 11:23–26), and the language developed into a liturgical formula.

## ■ Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt 26:36–46; Mk 14:32–42; Lk 22:39–46)

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is recorded in all the Synoptic Gospels. Instead of Mark's 'Abba Father' [αββα ὁ πατήρ] (Mk 14:36), Matthew uses 'my father' [πάτερ μου] (Mt 26:39, 42; cf. Mt 6:9). Matthew's version offers several parallels to the wording of the 'Lord's Prayer' (Mt 6:9–13) (Witherington 2006, p. 492). The petition not to come into temptation (μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν, Mt 26:41) is similar to the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:13). Jesus' reference to the will of the Father (γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, Mt 26:42) also finds a direct parallel in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:10). It seems that the Lord's Prayer is presented as the ideal prayer and exemplified by Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. In Matthew's version, Jesus goes to pray three times, which recalls the trifold action of 'ask, seek and knock' (Mt 7:7–11), and expresses the intensity of his prayers.<sup>47</sup>

Jesus' prayer echoes elements of prayers found in the OT. God is asked if he would change his mind (cf. Ex 32:10–14; Nm 13–14; 2 Ki 20:1–6; Jr 18:5–11). Jesus expresses his grief – 'περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕως θανάτου' [my soul is very sorrowful, even to death] (Mt 26:38) – with expressions similar to what is found in psalms of lament (Ps 41:6, 12; 42:5; [LXX]).

Progression to accept 'God's will' can be recognised in Jesus' petitions. In his first petition he asks God to remove 'the cup' (εἰ δυνατόν ἐστιν παρελθάτω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο, Mt 26:39).<sup>48</sup> His second petition displays some realisation that God wants him to drink 'the cup' (εἰ οὐ δύναται τοῦτο παρελθεῖν ἐὰν μὴ αὐτὸ πῖω, Mt 26:42). The question, 'if it is possible' (Mt 26:39), develops towards a submission: 'thy will be done' [γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου] (Mt 26:42). This submission confirms the third petition of the

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46. Exegetes of the Reformation interpret εὐλογίσας as thanksgiving, while Catholics regards it as the blessing of the elements (Luz 2005, p. 373).

47. The number three is also used to refer to the intense prayer of Paul (2 Cor 12:8).

48. 'The cup' refers to Jesus' death (Mt 20:22; 26:26–35).

‘Lord’s Prayer’. Jesus repeats this prayer when he prays for the third time (Mt 26:44). With his prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus enacts the Scriptures.

As part of this scene, Jesus instructs Peter and the two sons of Zebedee to ‘γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν· τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον, ἡ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής’ [watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak] (Mt 26:41). The weakness of his disciples in times of trial is expressed. To avoid temptation, they need to ‘watch’ and ‘pray’.

## ■ Last words of Jesus on the cross (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34)

On his way to the cross Jesus is abandoned by his disciples (Mt 26:56, 69–75), and on the cross he is even abandoned by God as he cries out “Ἡλεὶ Ἡλεὶ λεμὰ σαβαχθανεὶ” [*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*] (Mt 27:46). The irony is clear, as it stands in paradox against ‘God with us’ in Matthew 1:24. Moltmann (1974, p. 149) remarks, ‘just as there was a unique fellowship with God in his life and preaching, so in his death there was a unique abandonment by God’. Although Jesus has already been left by God, as expressed by the aorist ‘ἐγκατέλιπες’, he still prays.

The established address of God as ‘Father’ is replaced with the less intimate address ‘God’, which expresses Jesus’ rejection and pain. Similar language to that found in psalms of lament occurs as Jesus cries out with a loud voice (cf. Ps 17:7; 21:3, 6, 24; 68:4; [LXX]; Ezk 11:13, repeated in v. 50). In this prayer of abandonment, Jesus utters the words of Psalm 22:1a.

## ■ Prayer to and worship of Jesus (Mt 28:17)

During his public ministry, only one prayer towards Jesus is recounted, and that is when the disciples worshipped him [προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ] in the boat after the storm had abated (Mt 14:33). However, Jesus is begged to save or heal people in need in several scenes (Mt 8:8, 25; 14:30; 15:22, 25; 17:15; 20:30–33). In most of these passages, Jesus is addressed as ‘Lord’ [κύριος], after which a petition follows.<sup>49</sup> Jesus is asked to save (σῶσον, Mt 8:25, 14:30), to have mercy (ἐλέησον, Mt 9:27; 15:22), to help (βοήθει, Mt 15:25) and to heal (ιάομαι, Mt 8:8). In Matthew 8:25 and 14:30 the petitioners use the combination ‘Lord save’ [κύριε σῶσον], an address commonly found in the Psalms (e.g. Ps 3:8; 6:4; 7:2; 11:2; 19:10). All these utterances are expressions of trust and devotion.

49. Though the title ‘Lord’ is not used in Matthew 9:18–26, the petitioner knelt down [προσεκύνει] before Jesus.

However, when the disciples see Jesus after his resurrection on the mountain in Galilee, it is explicitly stated that they worship him (ιδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, Mt 28:17).<sup>50</sup> In this last scene Jesus is the proper recipient of worship. Read along with the strict monotheism that was set out in the temptation scene (Mt 4:9-10), Jesus in this climactic scene forms part of the one to be worshipped. The parallel between the temptation scene and this mountain setting should be noticed. Both entail power over the world. While Jesus' ministry begins with strict Jewish monotheism, it climactically ends by integrating Jesus into it.

## ■ Summary

The resolution of Jesus' temptation with his theocentric appeal to the *Shema* that God alone must be worshipped (Mt 4:10) forms the basis of Matthew's teaching on prayer throughout. Jesus, in Matthew, offers teaching on prayer (extensive in the Sermon on the Mount), and in his ministry demonstrates the praxis thereof. In doing so, he sets an example of prayer for his disciples to follow.

The wording of Jesus' prayers displays a unique relationship between him and God. Jesus' prayers are dialogues of the Son with the Father. Jesus' disciples are called into this relationship in such a sense that if they have a relationship with Jesus, they can also address God as their father (Mt 6:9). Jesus is present when his disciples pray to the Father (Mt 18:19-20). In the post-resurrection scene, Jesus confirms that he is always with his disciples (Mt 28:20). They should believe in Jesus and worship him, as he is included in the *Shema* (Mt 28:17). Prayer presupposes a relation with God that those who are not followers of Jesus do not have.

Jesus observed Jewish piety in his prayers. This piety is emphasised with the use of Moses and Elisha typology; OT characters who had intimate relations with God. Jesus' prayer language frequently echoes words from the Psalms. Jesus' prayers express his empathy towards the meek and humble. Through prayer he accepts God's will and plan to save his people, even though it leads towards his own deep suffering.

Jesus criticises the presumptuous and insincere piety and prayers of religious leaders of his day. Prayer should not be misused as public display in order to seek public admiration. The temple ought to be a 'house of prayer' and any misconduct should not be tolerated. Jesus is in the midst of his people. He is 'more than the temple' (Mt 12:6).

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50. Προσκυνέω is used several times in the Gospel (Mt 2:11; 4:9; 9:18; 14:33).

The prayers of his community replace the misconduct that took place in the temple.

Prayers ought to serve the will of God and require humility. His will is supreme and must be accepted (cf. Mt 26:36–46). Such acceptance often involves a process of change by the one who prays. Prayers enable humans to live righteous lives (Mt 5–7). A righteous life ought to be pursued, willed and received in prayer. Those who pray act as God’s agents in continuing the ministry of Jesus.

In prayer, an overlap between Heaven and Earth develops, as it expects God’s direct involvement in creation. It calls for an ideal reality which is not fully present yet (Mt 6:10). Prayer assumes eschatological expectations (Mt 10:23; 16:28; 24:34). Jesus’ disciples are called to watch and pray amidst trials and tribulation (Mt 26:41).

## ■ Luke

Among the Synoptic Gospels, Luke offers the most comprehensive material on prayer. The theme plays an important role in Lucan theology (Viljoen 2007, pp. 707–719). Jesus’ first and last acts in this gospel are prayers (Lk 3:21; 23:46). Often, this gospel refers to prayer with no parallels in the other Synoptic Gospels (e.g. Lk 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28). Luke’s material on prayer includes stylised prayers, narrative references and teaching (Nygaard 2012, p. 107).

### ■ Communal prayer during the hour of incense (Lk 1:10)

The Gospel of Luke begins with a scene of pious worshippers at the temple. While Zechariah observes his priestly turn in the temple, a whole multitude of worshippers assembles outside at the time for the burning of incense (Lk 1:10).<sup>51</sup> This refers to the customary communal activity of the pious Jewish laity at the temple during the hour of sacrifice (cf. Sir 50:19; Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2. 196). Luke thus introduces the idea of corporate prayer. On the one hand, the burning of the incense symbolises the offering of the people’s prayers and sacrifices to God, and on the other hand, it implies that the announcement of the good news to Zechariah was the answer to the people’s prayers for a Messianic Saviour (Osborne 2010, p. 248).

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51. The 24 orders of priests took turns to take care of the sanctuary. One of them was chosen by drawn lots to take care of the Holy Place. Mishnah Tamid 5.2–63 explains how the drawing of lots was done.



## ■ Zechariah's prayer (Lk 1:13)

Inside the temple, Luke describes a prayer situation common to the OT. While the pious Zechariah is praying, an angel appears to announce that his prayer has been answered [εἰσηκούσθη ἡ δέησίς σου] (Lk 1:13).<sup>52</sup> It is during the most sacred moment of Zechariah's life, when he is chosen to burn the incense, when Gabriel tells him that his wife will give birth to his son, John. The misfortune of not having children is reversed in response to his prayer, similar to what Abram and Sarai (Gn 16-21), Isaac and Rebecca (Gn 25), Jacob and Rachel (Gn 29:31-30:24) and Hannah and Elkanah (1 Sm 2) had experienced (Nygaard 2012, p. 114).

## ■ Prayer songs (Lk 1:46-55, 67-79; 2:29-32)

The prayer songs in the infancy narrative demonstrate ideal piety.

In the '*Magnificat*' (Lk 1:46-55), the pious Mary praises God for his mercy and that he saves those who depend on him, while she offers herself as a willing servant to carry the child.

The '*Benedictus*' (Lk 1:67-79) continues the theme of pious servanthood. Luke remarks that Zechariah utters the prayer song while filled with the Holy Spirit. Later in the narrative, Luke often refers to the relation between the Holy Spirit and prayer (e.g. Lk 2:29-32; 10:21-22). Zechariah praises God, who sent Jesus as the Saviour.

The general picture of piety, servanthood and humility continues in the '*Nunc Dimittis*' (Lk 2:29-32). Once again, it is the Holy Spirit who leads Simeon to the Temple and to share a revelation (Lk 2:26-27).

Anna, the prophetess, never leaves the temple as she worships God night and day while fasting and praying. Once again, her conduct and words speak of piety and humility (Lk 2:36-38).

## ■ Baptism (Lk 3:21-22)

Luke is unique among the Synoptic Gospels to explicitly mention that Jesus was praying with his baptism: Ἰησοῦ βαπτισθέντος καὶ προσευχομένου ἀνεῳχθῆναι τὸν οὐρανὸν, καὶ καταβῆναι τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον σωματικῶς εἶδεν ὡς περιστερὰν ἐπ' αὐτόν, καὶ φωνὴν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ γενέσθαι Σὺ εἶ ὁ Υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα [when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from Heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with

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52. The visible presence of the divine also occurs in the prayer scene with Jesus' baptism (Lk 3:22) and when Jesus prays on Mount Olives (Lk 22:43).

you I am well pleased'] (Lk 3:21-22). The present participle 'προσευχόμενου' indicates that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus while he was praying.<sup>53</sup> The Spirit did not only descend as a result of Jesus' baptism but also in response to his prayer. The voice from Heaven [*bat qol*] uses kinship language [Σὺ εἶ ὁ Υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα] to express the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father (cf. Lk 1:32; 35; 2:11).

## ■ Temptation of Jesus (Lk 4:7-8; Mt 4:9-10)

While Matthew places the devil's enticement that Jesus should worship [προσκυνέω] him at the end of the temptation scene, Luke places it in the centre. Jesus recites from the *Shema* that God alone should be worshipped. This call upon the *Shema* set a principle for the early Christians who lived in communities with idols and images of gods all over. It was reasonable to expect from all people to show respect to a multitude of divinities. There was even a development towards emperor worship (Vinson 2008, p. 113). In contrast to this general contemporary custom, Jesus states in Luke that God is one and only he must be worshipped.

## ■ Jesus alone at prayer (Lk 5:16; Mk 1:35)

Amidst a series of miracle scenes with crowds gathering to hear Jesus and to be healed by him, Luke remarks that he often withdrew to lonely places and prayed during such busy times (αὐτὸς δὲ ἦν ὑποχωρῶν ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις καὶ προσευχόμενος, Lk 5:16). The two participles, ὑποχωρῶν and προσευχόμενος, following ἦν, imply actions that were constantly repeated. Placing this remark within the context of miracle scenes suggests that Jesus draws the ability to perform these miracles in answer to his prayers. Furthermore, Jesus' constant confrontation with painful conditions must have drained him so that he needed to replenish himself in prayer (Levine & Witherington 2018, p. 143).

## ■ Fasting and prayer in the bridegroom's absence (Lk 5:33)

Jesus is asked why his disciples do not fast and pray like John's or the Pharisees' disciples do (Lk 5:33).<sup>54</sup> From this scene, it seems that the religious practice of Jesus' disciples differed from that of other recognised groups in Jewish society. The piety and joy of Jesus' disciples is directed towards Jesus. Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom and the disciples

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53. The spirit being given in answer to prayer is found in other places too (e.g. Lk 11:13).

54. According to Luke 18:9-14 the Pharisees fasted twice a week.

as his guests.<sup>55</sup> This symbolism echoes the OT tradition of Israel being the bride of God (e.g. Hs 1-3; cf. Is 5:1; 54:4; Ez 16:15-63; 23:1-49) (Nygaard 2012, p. 123).

## ■ Jesus alone at prayer for a second time (Lk 6:12-13)

As in Luke 5:15, Luke writes that Jesus withdrew to pray: ἐξελθεῖν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι, καὶ ἦν διανυκτερεύων ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ [he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God] (Lk 6:12). Jesus transcends normal Jewish piety. He did not pray only two or three times a day but spent entire nights with God. This is the first time Luke makes mention of praying on a mountain, a practice that occurs again later in the narrative (Lk 9:28; 19:29; 21:37; 22:39). In the OT, God's presence is often manifested on mountains (cf. Horeb – Ex 3:1-4:17; 18:5; 19:3-13; 24:13; Dt 1:6; Zion: Ps 48:1; 68:16; 99:2; Is 2:3; 40:9) (Nygaard 2012, p. 124). This prayer precedes the scene when Jesus chooses his apostles.<sup>56</sup> The decisiveness of this choice urges Jesus to pray.

## ■ Prayer for enemies (Lk 6:28)

Jesus, in Luke, instructs his followers to pray for their enemies: εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς καταρωμένους ὑμᾶς, προσεύχεσθε περὶ τῶν ἐπηραζόντων ὑμᾶς [bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you] (Lk 6:28).<sup>57</sup> Prayer is offered as a response to the theodicy<sup>58</sup> of being opposed by evil sinners (Nygaard 2012, p. 126).<sup>59</sup> Through prayer, his disciples should demonstrate God's kindness (χρηστός, Lk 6:35) and mercy (οἰκτίμονες, Lk 6:36). This distinguishes them as children of the 'Most High' (Lk 6:35).

## ■ Feeding of the five thousand (Lk 9:16; Mk 6:41; Mt 14:19)

While Matthew and Mark each narrate two feeding miracles (Mk 6:41; 8:6 and Mt 14:19; 15:36.), Luke has only one. Luke writes that when Jesus took

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55. The rabbinic tractate 'Megillat Taanit' [the Scroll of Fasting] includes weddings among a list of 35 festivities during which Jews were permitted to break their fast.

56. The Church at Antioch also prays before appointing co-workers (Ac 13:2-3; 14:23).

57. In Matthew 6:44, Jesus urges his followers to love their enemies, though not with explicit reference to prayer.

58. To bless is an opposite response to cursing, as to pray is opposite to mistreating.

59. Jesus seems to be presented as an example to be followed in this respect. His enemies rejected and killed him. Yet, at the moment of his death, he prays for them (Lk 23:34).

the five loaves and the two fish, ‘ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εὐλόγησεν αὐτούς’ [he looked up to Heaven and said a blessing over them] (Lk 9:16).<sup>60</sup> As in Matthew and Mark, this gesture and blessing characterise Jesus as a praying Jewish male, an action that anticipates that of the Last Supper and the church’s rite at the Lord’s table (cf. 1 Cor 11:20).

### ■ Jesus alone at prayer for the third time (Lk 9:18)

Directly after the feeding miracle, Luke writes for the third time that Jesus went to pray: ‘αὐτὸν προσευχόμενον κατὰ μόνας συνῆσαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταί’ [he was praying alone, the disciples were with him] (Lk 9:18). In the previous two scenes Jesus was praying all alone, but in this scene his disciples are with him. However, the disciples are only partially included in the scene. Luke still mentions that he is praying alone.

### ■ Transfiguration as prayer scene (Lk 9:28–29)

Other than in Mark and Matthew, Luke describes the transfiguration in a prayer scene. Jesus ascends the mountain<sup>61</sup> in order to pray (προσεύξασθαι, Lk 9:28), and it was in prayer (ἐν τῷ προσεύχεσθαι, Lk 9:29) that the appearance of his face changed. Luke is unique in describing the two major scenes of baptism and transfiguration as prayer-events. In both scenes, God’s voice [*bat qol*] is heard from Heaven signifying the communion between God and his son. This revelation and voice confirm the confession Peter has made of Jesus in the previous scene (Lk 9:20).

### ■ Prayer for missionary work (Lk 10:2b; Mt 9:38)

In the missionary discourse, the circle of Jesus’ close companions of twelve is widened to include 72. Jesus urges this group to pray for more workers in the harvest: ‘δεήθητε οὖν τοῦ Κυρίου τοῦ θερισμοῦ ὅπως ἐργάτας ἐκβάλλῃ εἰς τὸν θερισμὸν αὐτοῦ’ [therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest] (Lk 10:2b). Missionary work begins with prayer. While Jesus sends them out, he also urges them to pray for co-workers, as the task is overwhelming for those few that are at work. Their task is not only to actively work as labourers in the harvest but also to pray for the harvest. By praying, they actively participate in the realising of God’s plans. While prayers give harvesters as co-workers of God insight into his plans, they also form part of the harvesting activity.

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60. It seems to be a blessing of the elements rather than a blessing of God (Bovon 2002, p. 357).

61. As mentioned before, the motif of the mountain accentuates the encounter with God.

## ■ **Thanksgiving and jubilation (Lk 10:21; Mt 11:25b–26)**

Similar to Matthew, Luke includes Jesus' cry of jubilation and thanksgiving for God's revelation through him: 'Ἐξομολογοῦμαι σοι, Πάτερ, Κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἀπέκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν, καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις· ναί, ὁ Πατήρ, ὅτι οὕτως εὐδοκία ἐγένετο ἔμπροσθέν σου' [I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will] (Lk 10:21). Other than Matthew, Luke specifically mentions that this utterance comes as a result of his joy in the Holy Spirit: 'ἠγαλλιάσατο τῷ Πνεύματι τῷ Ἁγίῳ καὶ εἶπεν' [he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said] (Lk 10:20). Luke often speaks of characters that are filled with joy and then praise God because he fulfils his promises. For the first time in Luke, the words of Jesus' prayer are provided. In a complementary fashion, God is addressed as 'Lord of Heaven and Earth' and also as 'Father'. It is fitting for Jesus to address God as 'Father' as God, earlier in the narrative, has called him his 'Son' (Lk 3:21–22; 9:35). Jesus enjoys an intimate relationship with the Father. Because of this relationship, Jesus' disciples can also get to know God.

## ■ **Jesus teaches on prayer (Lk 11:1–13; Mt 6:9–15; 7:7–11)**

Luke offers an extended prayer-teaching of Jesus (Lk 11:1–13). This follows shortly after he has recounted Jesus' own prayer (Lk 10:21–22). After observing Jesus at prayer (Lk 9:18; 9:28–29) and being instructed to join in prayer (Lk 10:2), the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray, just as John taught his disciples.<sup>62</sup> Jesus tells them to address God as 'Father' (without 'our' as in Mt 6:9). Because of their relationship with Jesus, the Son of God, Jesus' disciples may enjoy this new relationship with God. Jesus teaches his disciples the 'Lord's Prayer'. Other than the six petitions in the teaching in Matthew 6:9–13, the teaching in Luke consists of only five petitions.<sup>63</sup>

The *first petition*, 'ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου' [hallowed be your name] (Lk 11:2a), speaks of Israel's basic view of God and also to the kind of life God has called them to live (Lv 11:45; 22:32; Is 5:16; Ez 20:41; 36:20; 38:23) (Nygaard 2012, p. 138). God is holy and he requires his people to live a holy life. The *second petition*, 'ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου' [your kingdom come]

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62. While Jesus explained why his disciples need not fast like John's disciples (Lk 5:33), they still need to pray.

63. Slight variations exist between Matthew's and Luke's versions. Luke, for example, does not have the petition 'your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven' found in Matthew 6:10. Marshall (2001, p. 115) remarks that Matthew's longer version may have been 'instructions on how to pray for people who do pray', while Luke's shorter version may have been 'an encouragement to people who do not pray to do so'.

(Lk 11:2b), expresses the importance of prayer for the coming of God's kingdom (currently as well as eschatologically), a motif that is central to Luke (39 occurrences). The *third petition* addresses the need for daily bread: 'τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν' [give us each day our daily bread] (Lk 11:3). God is asked to provide for all the needs each day, physically, though spiritual needs are not excluded. The *fourth petition* expresses the need for continuous forgiveness - 'καὶ ἄφεσις ἡμῖν τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν' [and forgive us our sins] (Lk 11:4a) - but also the necessity to forgive others - 'καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν' [for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us] (Lk 11:4b). The last petition asks God to protect weak human beings who are continually tested: 'καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν' [and lead us not temptation] (Lk 11:4c).<sup>64</sup>

Jesus, in Luke, continues this teaching with a parable, unique to Luke, about a man asking his friend for bread at midnight (Lk 11: 5-8). The parable expresses the boldness with which one may approach God with one's needs.<sup>65</sup>

Three imperatives - αἰτεῖτε, ζητεῖτε, καὶ κρούετε [ask, seek and knock] (Lk 11:9-10; Mt 7:7-11) - follow, indicating what continuous and intense asking entails, each followed by the assurance that God will answer.

Typical of Luke, Jesus' teaching concludes with a promise of the Holy Spirit, the ultimate good gift.<sup>66</sup> In several places, Luke mentions that the Holy Spirit is promised (Lk 24:49; Ac 1:4; cf. also Lk 3:16) as an answer to prayer (Ac 1:14; 2:1-4; 4:23-31; 8:14-17; 9:11-17) (Nygaard 2012, p. 143).

## ■ Two parables on prayer and salvation (Lk 18:1-14)

In Luke 18, Jesus' teaching on prayer continues, telling his audience that it is fitting to pray at all times (πάντοτε, Lk 18:1). He tells two parables, probably directed at two different groups. The first is directed towards his disciples (Lk 18:1-8) and the second towards the Pharisees (Lk 18:9-14).

The first parable tells the story of a judge who would not attend to a widow's case. However, the widow persists in her requests, so the judge gives in. Jesus explains the meaning of the parable with a 'qal v'homer' construction. In comparison to the judge, how much more willing will God be to 'grant justice' [ποιήσῃ τὴν ἐκδίκησιν] to the 'elect' [τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν]. This parable teaches patience and perseverance in the prayer of a fragile and dependent human being. Although God does hear the pleas of his people,

64. Vinson (2008, pp. 361-367) lists parallels in Jewish prayers from the Second Temple period to each of these petitions.

65. Similar persistency is recounted in the parable of the widow and the judge (Lk 18:1-8).

66. Matthew 7:11 only speaks of 'good gifts'.

they often need to wait for his response. The prayer not only cries for vindication but also for strength to remain faithful to Christ. A person who continues to pray while waiting demonstrates real faith (πίστις, Lk 18:8).

In the second parable, the one directed towards the Pharisees (Lk 18:9-14), two forms of piety are contrasted. The one is of a self-centred Pharisee who thanks God for his own accomplishments. The other is of a humble tax-collector who confesses his sinfulness. The tax-collector's words are reminiscent of Psalm 51. A person who approaches God like the Pharisee does must not expect a favourable hearing. Instead, one should address God in the manner the tax-collector does.

### ■ A house of prayer (Lk 19:46; Mt 21:13; Mk 11:17)

Luke has a much shorter version of Jesus denouncing the activities in the temple than Mark and Matthew. Though he includes Jesus' accusation of the activities in the temple – 'ἔσται ὁ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς· ὑμεῖς δὲ αὐτὸν ἐποιήσατε σπήλαιον ληστῶν' [my house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers] (Lk 19:46)<sup>67</sup> – he does not mention the cursing of the fig tree, the saying about faith that moves mountains or the concluding teaching on prayer. In Luke, Jesus' judgement against the temple is softer than in the other Synoptic Gospels.<sup>68</sup> Early in the narrative, ideal temple piety is found in the infancy narrative (Lk 1-2), Jesus is staying in his 'Father's house' (Lk 2:46) and the disciples stay at the temple at the end of the gospel (Lk 24:53). However, Jesus does predict the destruction of the temple (indirectly in Lk 19:44 and fully in 21:5), and the leaders are upset about his conduct in the temple (Lk 19:47). Jesus distances himself from the malpractices that took place in the temple, but the temple still has a meaningful role in Luke's narrative.

### ■ Prayer for show (Lk 20:47; Mk 12:40)

Jesus warns against teachers of the Law who 'προφάσει μακρὰ προσεύχονται' [for pretence make long prayers] (Lk 20:47). Such prayers are actually directed towards people and not towards God (cf. Mt 5:20; 6:6). Jesus, in Luke, does not reject sustained prayer as such, as shown by the widow in Luke 18:1-8, but that prayers are misused for self-esteem (Nygaard 2012, p. 149). The irony in this accusation of the teachers of the Law is stark, as they were supposed to be religious experts but actually failed horribly because of this superficial piety.

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67. Similar to Matthew, Luke's version also drops 'for all nations' in this quotation from Isaiah 56:7. This was probably intentional, to indicate the Christian church becoming the place for prayers of all nations (Bovon 2012, p. 20).

68. The attack is less directed toward the temple than against those who abused it for profit (Bovon 2012, p. 18).

## ■ Prayer in the eschatological discourse (Lk 21:36; Mt 24:20; Mk 13:18)

As in Mark and Matthew, in Luke Jesus also mentions prayer as a response to the eschatological difficulty: ‘ἀγρυπνεῖτε δὲ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ δεόμενοι ἵνα κατισχύσητε ἐκφυγεῖν ταῦτα πάντα τὰ μέλλοντα γίνεσθαι, καὶ σταθῆναι ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου’ [but stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place] (Lk 21:36). Jesus’ followers should not lose heart, but must persist in praying for strength to be sustained at the unexpected arrival of times of tribulation. His disciples need to keep on praying while they await his return.

## ■ Last Supper (Lk 22:17-19; Mt 26:26-27)

At the Last Supper Jesus gives thanks [εὐχαριστήσας] for the wine and bread, respectively, before he gives it to his disciples. This thanksgiving does not include a petition but pictures Jesus as a typical head of a Jewish family, giving thanks to God when having a meal.

## ■ Prayer for the recovery of Simon Peter (Lk 22:31-32)

In all three of the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus warns his disciples of the tribulation and Satan’s testing that lie ahead, to which Peter responds that he will remain faithful. Yet Luke is unique in mentioning Jesus’ assurance that he has prayed for him: ‘ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ σοῦ ἵνα μὴ ἐκλίπη ἡ πίστις σου’ [I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail] (Lk 22:32). The verb ‘ἐδεήθην’ that Jesus uses is stronger than ‘ask’ [αἰτέω], as found in Luke 1:63. Despite Peter’s confidence, Jesus realises Peter’s and his fellow disciples’ weaknesses. Jesus addresses Peter not as the ‘rock’, but as ‘Simon, Simon’, expressing Peter’s weakness but also affection (Bovon 2012, p. 177). Jesus has prayed that Peter and the other disciples’ faith would endure the trial and that they would recover after their lapse. This verse puts Jesus in the role of advocate for his followers.

## ■ Jesus’ prayer on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39-46; Mk 14:32-42; Mt 26:36-46)

Similar to Mark and Matthew, Luke narrates that Jesus prayed before his arrest. Luke defines this as Jesus’ customary practice [κατὰ τὸ ἔθος]. This statement not only defines Jesus as a pious Jew who prayed constantly but also as one who prays before festivals.<sup>69</sup> Jesus prays consistently and

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69. When Jesus was twelve years old, his parents also went to the Feast of the Passover [κατὰ τὸ ἔθος] (Lk 2:42).



especially at decisive events, of which his crucifixion is most decisive. While Mark and Matthew tell that he prayed in Gethsemane, Luke refers to it as Mount Olives, once again reminiscent of the OT practise to seek God's presence on mountains.

The passage displays a chiasmic structure, with Jesus at the beginning calling his disciples to pray (Lk 22:40) and a call repeated at the end (Lk 22:46). In the middle of this chiasm, divine intervention takes place as the angel appears to strengthen Jesus (Lk 22:43).

Other than Mark and Matthew, Luke does not speak of three cycles of Jesus' prayer, but only provides a single truncated version. In this he demonstrates Jesus' prayerful submission to his father's will. Jesus' serious struggle is shown in his withdrawal (*ἀπεσπάσθη*, Lk 22:41), and reference to his agony (*ἀγωνία*, Lk 22:44) and sweat falling like drops of blood (*ὡσεὶ θρόμβοι αἵματος*, Lk 22:44). The humility and intensity of his prayer are shown as he kneels down to pray. He asks if God could change his mind: 'Πάτερ, εἰ βούλει παρένεγκε τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἀπ' ἐμοῦ· πλὴν μὴ τὸ θέλημά μου ἀλλὰ τὸ σὸν γινέσθω' [Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done] (Lk 22:42). Similar requests are found in the OT prayers (Ex 32:10-14; 2 Sm 15:25-26; 2 Ki 20:1-6; cf. 1 Mc 3:58-60). However, he is willing to accept God's will, despite how terrifying it would be. Amidst this struggle, an angel appears and strengthens him, with the result that he could pray more earnestly (Lk 23:43-44). He finds closure and ends his prayer by accepting the passion that lies ahead.

Before and after his own prayer, Jesus calls his disciples to pray.<sup>70</sup> They urgently need to pray as they are about to face serious temptation: 'προσεύχεσθε μὴ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς πειρασμόν' [pray that you may not enter into temptation] (Lk 22:40) and 'ἀναστάντες προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν' [rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation] (Lk 22:46). This testing of the disciples draws back to Jesus warning to Peter shortly before of 'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail' (Lk 22:31-32). Through prayer, they will be enabled to face and overcome these trials.

## ■ Prayer from the cross (Lk 23:34)

While hanging on the cross, Jesus prays for his enemies – Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς· οὐ γὰρ οἴδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν [Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do] (Lk 23:34) – a prayer found only in Luke. As previously in the narrative (Lk 10:21; 11:2; 22:42; 23:46), he again addresses God as 'Father'.

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70. In the versions of Matthew (26:41) and Mark (14:38), this instruction is only given once, and it occurs in the middle of the episode.

Jesus prays for the repentance and forgiveness of his enemies and those who are ignorant. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for their enemies (Lk 6:28), and he does it himself. In Acts 7:60, Stephen has a similar prayer, following the example of his master, though with different words.

### ■ Jesus' last words on the cross (Lk 23:46)

Jesus' last words on the cross, 'Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεμαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου' [Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!] (Lk 23:46), are taken from Psalm 31:6 (LXX 30:6). He calmly commends his spirit to his father. Rabbis prescribed these words as an evening prayer. By addressing God as 'Father' he expresses his humble submission and trust that God will take care of him despite his present anguish. When Stephen was stoned to death, he uttered similar words (Ac 7:59), following the example of his master.

### ■ Jesus blesses bread (Lk 24:30–31)

As in Luke 9:16 and 22:19, Jesus again utters a blessing at the breaking of bread before the eyes of the wanderers to Emmaus: 'λαβὼν τὸν ἄρτον εὐλόγησεν καὶ κλάσας ἐπέδίδου αὐτοῖς, αὐτῶν δὲ διηνοίχθησαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοί, καὶ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν' [taking the bread he blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognised him] (Lk 24:30–31).<sup>71</sup> This action is reminiscent of the Last Supper and forms a Eucharistic framework of the revelation of the Risen One to the Emmaus wanderers (Bovon 2012, p. 375). It is significant that their eyes are not opened while Jesus explains the Scriptures, but while he is praying. As a result of prayer, they gain insight and understanding.

### ■ The disciples worship Jesus and bless God (Lk 24:52–53)

In Luke, Jesus never prays with his disciples. He prays before he calls his disciples (Lk 6:12–12), he prays that Peter will keep his faith (Lk 22:31–32), and at the end of the Gospel of Luke he blesses them (Lk 24:50). For Luke, the disciples cannot unite with Jesus in prayer, as he becomes the object of their prayer and adoration. Luke expresses this at the end of his gospel as the disciples respond by worshipping Jesus once he has blessed them (προσκυνήσαντες αὐτόν, Lk 24:52). Yet, God is one and God alone must be worshipped [*Shema*]. With this ending, Luke makes it clear that Jesus is

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71. Their eyes were opened in contrast to the eyes that were held back at the beginning of the scene (οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν ἐκρατοῦντο, Lk 24:16).

included in this theocentric adoration of God.<sup>72</sup> Once they worshipped Jesus, the disciples proceeded by joyfully blessing God in the temple (ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν, Lk 25:53). Luke's narrative returns to the temple piety pictured in the infancy narrative, but also looks forward to Acts 1–6 where the early community worshipped in the temple.<sup>73</sup> Through Jesus, true piety is restored.

## ■ Summary

Among the Synoptic Gospels, Luke offers the most material on prayer. It includes descriptions of pious persons praying, Jesus at prayer, his teaching on prayer and disciples worshipping Jesus. These prayers contain petition, intercession, thanksgiving and confession of sin.

Jesus' appeal to the *Shema* sets the agenda for his prayer life and teaching. God is one, and only he should be worshipped. Jesus is characterised as the 'Son' of God his 'Father'. Throughout the Gospel of Luke, he addresses God in prayer as 'Father', which displays his intimate relationship with God. When he prays, he is alone with God while the disciples move to the background. He never prays with his disciples. His whole ministry flows from his life of prayer. He constantly prays and often withdraws to lonely places, especially at decisive and busy times. Through prayer he finds guidance, strength and authority for his ministry. Jesus' own prayer life forms a prime example. In different situations he enacts his own teaching on prayer.

Luke includes significant passages of direct teaching on prayer, notably in Luke 11 and 18. Jesus, in Luke, makes use of parables in his teaching (Lk 11:5–8 and 18:1–14). Prayer language that is used is strongly reminiscent of prayers in the OT, traditional Jewish piety and Temple practises. Prayer expresses intimate rapport with God (Lk 3:21; 5:16). Through Jesus, his followers may also call God their father. In cases of delays in answers to prayer, faith needs to be exercised within eschatological perspectives. Prayer bridges the human and heavenly realms. The Holy Spirit is frequently connected to prayer. The spirit instigates prayer, but is also promised in answer to prayer. Filling by the Holy Spirit both causes and results from prayer. The followers of Jesus serve God and partake in his work through prayer. The pious characters of faithful Israel are succeeded by Jesus' followers. Humility and the acknowledgement of continuous dependence on God form basic requirements for prayer, requirements that are

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72. Some passages could be understood as indirect hints at prayers directed to Jesus. This is especially true of the petitions directed to Jesus in several miracle scenes (Lk 4:39; 5:12; 7:1–10; 8:41).

73. It seems that the early Palestinian church worshipped regularly in the Temple and prayed (Lk 24:52–53).

exemplified in humble characters in the narrative. These followers embody the ideals of the temple. People who pray as such receive hallowing, vindication and justification in answer to their prayers.

The Gospel of Luke concludes with the disciples worshipping Jesus. God is one and God alone must be worshipped, and Jesus is included in this theocentric adoration of God.

## ■ Conclusion

By way of conclusion, a brief reflection is provided on some of the implications of the findings of this chapter. The theological reflection on prayer in the Synoptic Gospels is based on Jesus' life as well as his teachings and instructions in these documents.

### ■ Theocentric prayer

Jesus' appeal on the *Shema* in the temptation scene (Mt 4:10 and Lk 4:8) sets the theocentric agenda for the prayer-teaching in the gospels. God is one and God alone must be worshipped. This agenda is especially fitting for communities that are exposed to idols and images of a variety of gods.

### ■ Jesus as an example and teacher

The life of Jesus offers the ultimate example of prayer. He is depicted as one who is constantly in communion with his father in prayer. This relationship directs his ministry. To pray like Jesus is to pray in the correct manner.

Jesus' example in prayer is complemented by his explicit instructions and teaching. In all of the gospels, Jesus is portrayed teaching on prayer. In Matthew, Jesus' teaching on the Lord's Prayer plays a central role in the first and longest teaching discourse (Mt 5:1-7:29). His teaching on this prayer also plays a central role in Luke (Lk 11:2-4), where the teaching is complemented with parables on prayer (Lk 11:5-8; 18:1-14). After the cleansing of the temple, Jesus proceeds with prayer-teaching (Mk 11:22-25; Mt 21:12-22). In Gethsemane, Jesus urges his disciples to pray (Mk 14:38 et par.).

### ■ Relationship with God as Father

The gospels speak of God in personal terms. God is a person, and to pray builds a personal relationship with him.

The relationship between Jesus and the Father, as the Father's beloved son, is unique. Jesus expresses his unique and intimate communion with God when he addresses God as 'Father'.

Because of Jesus' unique relationship with God, he can also reveal the Father to his followers. Through his salvific ministry, he brings about this intimate relationship between God and his disciples. Jesus' followers become part of God's family. With 'Abba, Father' in prayer, God's children communicate with God as their loving father.

To pray is therefore not merely a matter of requests to receive benefits from God, but an expression of a personal relationship. God's children can approach him by asking and begging, as well as by crying, thanking and praising him.

## ■ Individual and corporate prayers

Since the beginning of his ministry, Jesus often withdraws to lonely places to pray. In some of these cases, he goes up mountains as Moses and Elijah – OT characters who had intimate relations with God – had done. Criticising the 'hypocrites' for making a show of their acts of piety, Jesus teaches his disciples to go into their inner rooms to be alone with God in prayer.

However, this does not exclude corporate prayer from God's people or praying in public. In typical Jewish style, Jesus blesses the food during his feeding miracles, during the Last Supper and with the wanderers of Emmaus. The faithful community gathered at the temple in prayer during the hour of incense in Luke's opening scene. When disciplining a member, the church community must pray for God's guidance.

## ■ Continuous prayer, especially at decisive moments

The Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus as being constantly in prayer since the beginning of his public ministry. Time and again, he would withdraw to pray, even during the most pressing times. He teaches his disciples to do the same. Those who realise their continuing needs, should continuously plead with God by asking, seeking and knocking.

Besides his continued communion with his father in prayer, Jesus prays especially at decisive moments of his life. He prays at his baptism and the heavens split open (Lk 3:21). Before he chooses his twelve disciples, he spends the entire night on a mountain in prayer (Lk 6:12-13). Following his prayer, he asks the disciples who they say he is, which results in Peter's confession (Lk 9:18). He takes the inner circle of his disciples on a mountain to pray, and his appearance changes while he is praying (Lk 9:28-29).

He earnestly prays at Gethsemane, so much so that his sweat falls to the ground like great drops of blood (Lk 22:44). As a result of his prayer, he is able to overcome his overwhelming anguish (Mt 26:38). It is in prayer that he expressed his desire to see the will of God accomplished for him to drink the cup of wrath over his personal desire to avoid this terrible suffering.

Even the cross itself is a time of prayer. Jesus asks his father to forgive his enemies (Lk 23:34) and to receive his spirit (Lk 23:46). The horror of Jesus' passion thus becomes a worship event!

The prayers of Jesus sustain him in his ministry while heading to the cross. Likewise, the prayers of his followers will sustain them to remain true in their loyalty and devotion.

## ■ Continuity with Old Testament piety

Jewish piety is presupposed for all the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus and other characters follow contemporary Jewish prayer customs. Prayer is associated with correct temple practises (Mt 21:12-22; Mk 11:12-25; Lk 1:10; 2:36-38; 18:9-14; 19:46; 24:53). Jesus would pray before meals (Mk 6:41; 8:6; 14:22-23 with parallels), and this community would observe corporate prayer meetings (Mt 18:19-20; Lk 1:10; 11:2). Jesus' style of prayer reminds of Moses and Elijah as ideal figures from the OT. Language from the Psalms is frequently used in praise and lament (e.g. Mt 11:25-27; 26:36-46; 27:46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 1:46-55, 67-79; 2:29-32; 10:21-22; 18:9-14; 23:46).

## ■ The temple as a house of prayer

Jesus stands critical to the contemporary temple establishment and cleanses the temple. It should have been a 'house of prayer', but it became a 'robbers den' (Mk 11:15-17 et par.). The scene is filled with irony because of the failure of the temple personnel who were supposed to be experts in piety. In contrast, it is the common followers of Jesus who display true piety. While the true function of the temple is not being fulfilled, the new community established by Jesus embodies the true intention of the temple (Mk 11:17; Mt 21:12-22; Lk 19:46).

However, the sentiment toward the physical temple is not all negative. In Luke, Jesus and his followers have their origin in the faithful worship of Israel in the temple (Lk 1-2). More than that, the Gospel of Luke also ends on the continuous worship of the community in the temple (Lk 24:53).

## ■ Persistence and eschatological expectation

Prayer expresses a reality that remains to be fulfilled. It will only fully realise with the return of Jesus (Lk 5:33; 18:1-14; 21:34). Those who pray expect future fulfilment and change (Mk 6:41; 8:6, Lk 1:67-79; 9:16; 22:15-20).

Until that time, the followers of Jesus must persist in prayer. Jesus repeatedly calls his disciples to watch and pray as evil temptations persist (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38). Their faith and trust must be sustained until the future is completely settled. They must avoid temptation and stay alert (Mt 6:13). They recognise their weakness and dependence upon God to provide for their needs. They recognise their sinfulness and continually pray for forgiveness.

Prayers reach out and plead to see part of the heavenly reality in the present. Prayer is a marker of an 'already-not-yet' eschatology.

## ■ Participating in God's work

By praying, one participates in God's work. Throughout his ministry, Jesus upholds communion with his father, which directs his ministry. In Gethsemane, he ultimately accepts and pursues God's plan. Jesus does not only set an example for his followers to do the same, but he explicitly teaches them to do so. God's ethical demands are only possible to pursue in prayer (Mt 6). By praying, they become agents in God's plan. They pray for the harvest and for harvesters (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2b). Corporate prayer leads the church in doing God's will when disciplining a member (Mt 18:19). They receive power to do God's work in answer to prayer (Mk 11:24–25). Jesus promises his authority to his followers on condition that they pray in faith. This promise does not refer to materialistic wishes. This prayer must be offered in Jesus' name, which implies that prayer must be according to the perspectives of Jesus.

## ■ The Holy Spirit inspires and promised

The Holy Spirit inspires prayer and devotion but is also promised as an answer to prayer. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus while he was praying (Lk 3:21–22). Zechariah and Simeon were inspired by the Holy Spirit to sing their prayer songs (Lk 1:67; 2:26–27). Jesus' teaching on prayer concludes with a promise of the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13).

## ■ Humility

Those who pray must be humble enough to accept the will of God. Jesus humbles himself in accepting the cup (Mk 14:36). He accuses persons who pray in order to gain personal honour (Mt 6). He tells a parable of a self-centred Pharisee and a humble tax-collector to teach his disciples the right attitude (Lk 18:9–14).

## ■ Jesus worshipped

Jesus is present with those who pray. Jesus, who founded the community (Mt 16:18), stays with it. After the cross and resurrection, the disciples worship Jesus (Mt 28:17; Lk 24:52). Jesus is included in this theocentric adoration of God.

# Prayer and authentic spirituality in the Gospel of John

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## ■ Introduction

While the word, 'pray' [προσεύχη] is never mentioned in the Gospel of John, authentic spirituality is at its core. But what is prayer? On a conventional level, prayer is seen as what humans ask of God – a one-way communication within the human–divine relationship – wherein humans take the initiative and God responds, one way or another. In the Gospel of John, however, the human–divine discourse runs in both directions. It is God's saving-revealing Word that is the source of both creation and redemption, and in the advent of the flesh-becoming Word [ὁ λόγος] and his signifying works, humanity is called to take a stand for or against the Revealer.<sup>74</sup> While Jesus counsels his followers as to how to ask and petition God effectively, and while his last

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74. On the reaction of the crowd in John 6:14–15, cf. Rudolf Bultmann ([1971] 2014, p. 213).



words culminate in a magnificent prayer for his followers, these direct presentations of prayer in the Gospel of John are best understood first by considering essential aspects of authentic spirituality, which invariably present prayer as a central feature of the human-divine relationship, involving responsiveness to the divine initiative, as well as asking in the name of Jesus and according to the Father's will.

Along these lines, scholars have tended to commit several errors in their interpreting of the Gospel of John. Firstly, going back to the anti-Schleiermacher work of David Strauss in 1865, some critical scholars have driven a wedge between history and theology, thus seeing John's theological thrust as a displacement of its historical voice (Strauss [1865] 1977).<sup>75</sup> Secondly, information about the historical Jesus is limited to the Synoptics, excluding the one gospel claiming first-hand memory of Jesus: John.<sup>76</sup> Thirdly, understandings of Jesus and his ministry based solely upon the Synoptic accounts fail to take into consideration the spirituality of the Johannine account, which plausibly sheds valuable light on the Jesus of history as well as the Christ of faith.<sup>77</sup> Fourthly, this calls for an inclusive quest for Jesus – as the first three quests have programmatically excluded the Gospel of John from the field of research – which also deserves consideration within the evolving Johannine situation (Anderson 2021, pp. 7–41). Fifthly, while the spirituality and mysticism of the Fourth Gospel reflect the developing thrust of Johannine Christianity, they also inform the Jewish spirituality of Jesus of Nazareth in a number of important ways.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, John's contributions to understanding prayer and authentic spirituality inform not only our understandings of the Christ of faith, but they also provide fresh insights into the mission and work of the Jesus of history.

## ■ Prayer as receptivity and responsiveness within the human-divine dialogue

Of course, any thoughtful analysis of John's theological content must also be informed by adequate understandings of its composition process, its relations to the Synoptics, and its development within the Johannine

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75. See my analysis (Anderson 2013a, pp. 63–81).

76. In Schleiermacher's view ([1864] 1975), the unified and reflective presentation of Jesus in the Gospel of John – in contrast to the segmented presentations of the Synoptics – points to the Fourth Gospel as the only narrative rooted in first-hand memory of Jesus and his ministry.

77. For the more extensive set of implications, see the work of the John, Jesus and History Project in addition to Anderson (2006).

78. On the spirituality of Jesus in the Gospel of John, cf. Countryman (1995); Sanford (1993); Kanagaraj (1998); LaChance (2009); Spong (2013); Howard-Brook (2014).

situation over several decades.<sup>79</sup> While the Johannine Christ-hymn does not represent the first stroke of the evangelist's quill, its addition to a more grounded narrative presents the mission of Jesus as a cosmic event, announcing the redemption of the world by its creator.<sup>80</sup> Within that cosmic drama, God's Word is confessed as being the light and life of all humanity, inviting a response of faith to the divine initiative (Jn 1:1-5). On the one hand, the light of Christ is universally accessible to all (v. 9). On the other, receptivity and responsiveness to the divine initiative is preconditioned upon embracing the light and walking in it (Jn 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:35). This Christ-hymn also reflects with both hope and poignance upon the uneven experience of Johannine Christianity. While some did not receive him, as many as believed in his name received the empowerment to become children of God – born 'not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God' (v. 13). In that sense, believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God – the purpose of the Johannine witness and the response of faith itself (Jn 20:31) – is a form of prayer within the human-divine dialogue.

Note here that 'sin' in the Fourth Gospel is regarded as the failure to believe in the Son, and unbelief in John is the leading descriptor of sin (Jn 3:36; 8:24; 16:9). Further, having seen the truth and denying it magnifies the gravity of sin (Jn 9:41; 15:22), as it reflects the refusal to be receptive and responsive to the divine initiative. The obstacle to believing, as referenced in the Johannine Christ-hymn, involves holding to that which is of human origin rather than divine origin – in general terms, trusting in religious scaffolding or political platforms rather than that which originates in God (Jn 1:10-13). This theme is spelled out in the narrative in several ways. In John 5 and 9, the healing work of Jesus is a scandal to religious leaders who understand the Law of Moses as forbidding work on the Sabbath, thus being offended by the healings of the lame and the blind men in Jerusalem. The claims of Jesus are further scandalising in his claims to be acting on behalf of the Father, which rouses allegations of blasphemy (Jn 10:33).

Couched in terms of Plato's Allegory of the Cave (*Republic* 8), some who see the light seek to remain in darkness, lest it be exposed that their deeds were evil, rooted in creaturely origins rather than divine (Jn 3:18-21). Therefore, preferring darkness over light, in John, is seen as bondage to human understandings of things rather than that which is of liberating, divine

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79. My overall Johannine theory – the Dialogical Autonomy of the Fourth Gospel – is laid out in several of my publications, but the most succinct overview is found in Anderson (2011, pp. 125-155).

80. In my view, later material added to the first edition of John (80-85 CE) included John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18; 19:34-35 and Chapters 6, 15-17, and 21. Thus, the early stages of the Johannine narrative appear to have responded to Mark's presentation of Jesus and his ministry in augmentative ways, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist (Jn 1:6-8, 15, 19ff.) rather than a confessional Christ-hymn (Anderson 2015, pp. 169-218). On the addition of the Johannine Christ-hymn as the opening to the final edition of the narrative, cf. Anderson (2007a, pp. 311-345).

origin (Jn 8:12, 32). Put sociologically, they loved the praise of humans rather than the glory of God (Jn 12:43). This theme is developed in a dramatised way in the ‘temptation narrative’ of John 6, where the crowd tempts Jesus to provide more loaves, claiming that Moses provided manna from Heaven (v. 31). At this, Jesus responds that it was not Moses who *gave*, but the Father who *gives* the true bread from Heaven. Exegesis is thus trumped by eschatology (Anderson [1996] 2010, p. 216). As the discussion develops, Jesus declares that people have seen but have not believed (v. 36). Rather, the will of the Father is that all who see the Son might believe and receive eternal life (v. 40). When Jesus claims to be the bread that has come down from Heaven, the religious leaders refuse to believe, having known his earthly father and mother. At this, Jesus declares that no one can come to him except by being drawn by the heavenly Father (vv. 44, 65), as no one has seen God at any time, except the Son, who uniquely makes the Father known (Jn 1:18). Jesus then cites Isaiah 54:13, stating that ‘all shall be taught by God’ as the basis for people receiving his revelatory words and deeds (v. 45).

Thus, in the Gospel of John, the human–divine dialogue does not begin with humans imploring God to act or people petitioning a particular request from the Father. Rather, it is rooted squarely within the human response to the divine initiative, which is obstructed by investments in that which is rooted in human origin: dogmatic certainty, religious traditionalism, political status or social conventions. Conversely, openness to the truth, authentic spirituality and compassionate ministry reflect the embrace of God’s love, furthered in the ministry of Jesus. Those who genuinely know the Father’s love recognise its manifestations, revealed in the words and works of the Revealer, and a believing response to the divine initiative furthers the prayerful way of abundant life (Jn 10:10).

## ■ Prayer as authentic worship

While prayer is not explicitly presented with reference to effective worship, it certainly is associated with such throughout the Gospel of John. In contrast to the declaration of Jesus in the Synoptic temple incident (Mk 11:17, citing Is 56:7), ‘He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?’” [Ὁ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν]. But you have made it a den of robbers’. Conversely, in John (2:16), Jesus declares to the dove sellers, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!’ Upon reflection, the disciples declare the fulfilment of Scripture (v. 17; citing Ps 69:9): ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’. If familiarity with Mark by the Johannine evangelist can be inferred, the Jerusalem temple being a house of prayer for all nations [τοῖς ἔθνεσιν,

ethnic groups] is affirmed by the zeal of Jesus.<sup>81</sup> Rather than a marketplace accessible only to those who could afford the cost of sacrificial animals, having exchanged Roman currency for Jewish shekels, the concern of the Johannine Jesus reflects an egalitarian concern for access to the divine presence to be extended to the *am ha-aretz*, the poor of the land, who might otherwise not be able to afford the cost of receiving the blessings of sacrificial expiation.<sup>82</sup> Viewed in bi-optic (Johannine and Markan) perspective, Jesus may have created cognitive dissonance among various audiences in his day, elevating their vision to higher levels of faith development by his prophetic words and provocative deeds.<sup>83</sup>

Along these lines, the Johannine narrative also extends the theme of authentic prayer and worship as a grace to the nations even further, beyond the Synoptics. The culmination of the public ministry of Jesus is signalled by the coming of the Greeks to Jerusalem, who are introduced to Jesus by Philip.<sup>84</sup> At this encounter with members of the nations, Jesus declares, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified' (Jn 12:20-23). Even more pronounced is the mission of Jesus to the Samaritans. In contrast to Matthew 10:5, where Jesus instructs his disciples to not travel among the Gentiles or the Samaritans, the Johannine Jesus 'had to go through Samaria' (Jn 4:4).<sup>85</sup> In the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, not only does she come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, but she brings the entire village to him, and they come to believe for themselves (vv. 1-42). They even offer hospitality to Jesus and his band, and he stays with them for two days, whereupon they climactically proclaim '[...] this is truly the Savior of the world!' (v. 42; 1 John 4:14). Thus, the blessing of divine presence is

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81. Interestingly, if John 6 and 21 are among the passages added to an earlier edition by the compiler, the five signs in the earlier stages of the narrative are precisely those not found in Mark. If early aspects of Jesus' ministry are part of John's narrative (i.e. before John was imprisoned; Jn 3:24 vs Mk 1:14), and as Mark contains no miracles in Jerusalem, John's first edition seems designed to augment Mark chronologically and geographically (Anderson 2001, pp. 175-188, 2013b, pp. 197-245).

82. For an analysis of how Jesus is presented in a bi-optic perspective as creating cognitive dissonance by his works and words to lead audiences to higher levels of moral and faith development, cf. Anderson (2004, pp. 305-328).

83. Within the stages-of-faith contribution of James Fowler, John's Jesus can be seen to be lifting people's levels of faith development: from Synthetic-Conventional (Stage 3) Faith to Individuative-Reflective (Stage 4) Faith (challenging loving the praise of humans rather than the glory of God - Jn 12:43) and moving religious leaders from Individuative-Reflective (Stage 4) Faith to Conjunctive and Dialectical (Stage 5) Faith (challenging their claims to see, and thereby missing the revelatory function of the signs - Jn 9:41). (Anderson 2010 [1996], pp. 137-169; cf. Fowler 1981; see also Anderson, Ellens & Fowler 2004, pp. 247-276).

84. See the role of Philip as a transcultural bridge figure in the Johannine narrative in Anderson (2013c, pp. 162-182).

85. Luke also presents Jesus as ministering among the Samaritans (Lk 9:51-55; 17:11-19). On the likelihood that the formative Johannine tradition served as one of Luke's sources, see Anderson (2010).

extended universally to the Greeks and the Samaritans, as well as the house of Israel, in the Gospel and First Epistle of John.

In the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, however, the socio-religious provinciality of the divine presence is rebuked by Jesus. When asked by the woman which holy mountain was the authorised place of worship – Mount Zion in Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim in Sychar – Jesus replied, ‘neither’. Authentic worship is neither bound to place nor form; it is rooted in authenticity and available to all. Further, it is not simply humans that seek such or implore the deity for help; those who worship in spirit and in truth are precisely those whom the Father is actively seeking to draw into prayerful worship. Thus, authentic worship is not only the desire of human seekers; because they are also being sought by God, their seeking is already an indication of already having been sought – and found – by God (Jn 4)<sup>86</sup>:

You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (vv. 22-24)

It is at this point that the locus of temple worship is extended universally in the Fourth Gospel. Within the third stanza of Johannine Christ-hymn, God has tabernacled among humanity, not in the form of a building or a shrine, but in the form of a *person*: the Word made flesh [ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν]. It is via the Incarnation that the glory of the only begotten Son is encountered. Thus, the Johannine sacramental principle is incarnational. If a sacrament involves an outward and physical manifestation of an inward and spiritual reality, a living-breathing human has greater capacity to reveal than an inanimate object or form (Anderson [1996] 2010). John’s incarnational sacramentology is thereby eschatologically conveyed by the flesh-becoming Word, and in his resurrection. The Lord’s temple is reconstructed after three days in the tomb, which his followers encountered later, in post-resurrection consciousness (Jn 2:19-22). If the love and presence of Christ is going to be furthered in the world, it will happen through the followers of Jesus, who witness to him as he witnesses to the Father, instructed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And how is their discipleship noted? Not by an organisational membership or an outward marker, but by demonstrated and embodied love (Jn 13:34-35).

## ■ Prayer within human-divine agency

A distinctive feature of John’s story of Jesus is the presentation of the Father-Son relationship. On the one hand, the Father and the Son are one. If one has seen the Son, one has also seen the Father (Jn 10:30; 14:9).

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86. As Blaise Pascal notes, ‘Comfort yourself, you would not seek me if you had not found me’ (Pascal n.d.).

On the other hand, the Son is totally subservient to the Father. He declares that the Father is greater than he, and that he can do nothing except what the Father instructs (Jn 5:19, 30; 14:28). This might seem like two dissonant Christologies, but they are not. These features are actually flip-sides of the same coin – a Jewish agency schema. Contra Bultmann, this does not reflect a Gnostic Redeemer-Myth, although the Fourth Gospel influenced such theologies later. Rather, here we have an appropriation by Jesus of the Prophet-like-Moses agency schema rooted in Deuteronomy 18:15–22 (Anderson 1999, pp. 33–57; Borgen 1997, pp. 83–95). Within such a schema, God will send a Prophet-like-Moses who will not speak or act on his own behalf, only speaking and acting as God has instructed. The authenticity of the prophet is confirmed by his word coming true, and people must heed this prophet’s word as the word of God. A presumptuous prophet must be put to death, and his word need not be heeded.

This agency schema is called upon by Jesus to legitimate his ministry. When he is criticised by the Judean leaders for healing on the Sabbath, he claims divine authorisation as acting and speaking on God’s behalf. His adversaries claim to be disciples of Moses, but Jesus insists that Moses wrote of him, and that they ironically have not recognised the Scriptures pointing to him, as it was he of whom Moses wrote (Jn 5:39–46). The point here is that the word of Jesus is presented several times in John as coming true in order to confirm that he is indeed the one of whom Moses wrote (Jn 2:22; 8:28; 16:4; 18:9, 32). Therefore, the fulfilled word of Jesus confirms that his agency is indeed authentically commissioned by God and that his words and works should be received as those of the One who sent him. In something of a shocking set of statements, Jesus claims that his followers are one with him, as he is one with the Father (Jn 17:11, 21). This is not a metaphysical assertion, though; it is one of prophetic agency. As the Father sends the Son, and as the Father and the Son send the Spirit, so Jesus sends his followers as his saving-revealing agents in the world, conveying his loving mission, as guided and empowered by the Spirit.

Therefore, the Son was sent by the Father in order to reach the world with divine truth, light and love. The Father and the Son send the Spirit (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), who will instruct and empower believers who will then bear witness to the Son and the Father and the Spirit (Jn 1:7, 19; 4:49; 15:27; 19:34–35; 21:24) that all might believe (Jn 20:31). Along these lines, we see Jesus commissioning a plurality of apostles (not just Peter) – the basis for Luther’s teaching on the priesthood of all believers – in John 20:21–23.<sup>87</sup> Firstly, Jesus declares, ‘peace be with you’, consoling their loss. Secondly,

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87. As a pushback against the primacy-loving Diotrefes and his kin (3 Jn 9–10), who are excluding Johannine ministers from their church and expelling their own community members who offer them hospitality, note the Johannine presentation of a more primitive and familial form of ecclesial leadership (Anderson 2007b, pp. 6–41, [1996] 2010).

he breathes on them and invites them to receive the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, as the Father has sent him, so he commissions his followers as apostolic, priestly agents, extending the forgiveness of sins to any and all who may be in need of such liberation. Thus, not only is the Son sent by the Father and the Spirit sent forth by the Father and the Son, but believers are also commissioned as apostolic agents, extending the loving forgiveness of God to all for the sake of the world's healing.

## ■ Prayer as divine instruction, guidance and empowerment

Just as the divine initiative is the basis for humans seeking God, their seeking becomes evidence of their having been found by God. When Jesus inquires as to what or whom people are seeking, they become apostles to others. Andrew becomes an apostle to his brother Peter and Mary Magdalene becomes the apostle to the apostles (Jn 1:38; 20:15). No one can come to Jesus except by being drawn by the Father, because no one has seen God at any time (Jn 6:44). Such is not a matter of *permission* (no one may come); it is a factor of *possibility* (no one can come). This is the reason that the light of Christ is available to all humanity (Jn 1:9), while at the same time, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life – through which all who come to the Father do so (Jn 14:6–7). It is not a matter of God restricting humans unless they get their confessions or theological notions right; the only hope for humanity is the divine initiative, which Jesus eschatologically and climatically is. Human platforms and scaffolding are of no avail; the flesh profits nothing (Jn 6:63). The only hope for humanity is the saving-revealing work of God, but that work did not cease with the Incarnation. Indeed, Jesus promises to send the *Paraklētos* – the Advocate – the Holy Spirit, who will be with and in his followers, guiding them into the future (Jn 14:16–17).

On this score, the grieving disciples are comforted at the loss of the physical presence of Jesus as their teacher and master by his promise to send the Holy Spirit as an ongoing teacher and guide. Only if Jesus departs will the comforting Advocate be sent (Jn 16:7), also affirming the ministry of absence. While Jesus has been the first Advocate, pleading the case of those who may have sinned before the Father as an atoning sacrifice (1 Jn 2:1–2), the second Advocate will be with and in believers, abiding with them forever (Jn 14:16). This Advocate – the Holy Spirit – will perform several functions for believers. Firstly, as the Spirit of Truth, he will abide in and with believers (Jn 14:17). Secondly, the Holy Spirit will instruct believers in all ways they need, reminding them of what he has said to them (v. 26). Thirdly, the Spirit of Truth will testify on behalf of Jesus (Jn 15:26). Fourthly, the Advocate will convict the world of sin and of righteousness (Jn 16:8). Fifthly, the Spirit of Truth will guide believers into all truth, speaking what

he hears within the agency of his divine commission and declaring what is to come, taking also what is of the Lord and declaring it to his followers (vv. 13–15). Thus, following the physical absence of the ascended Lord, the Holy Spirit will expand and continue his work beyond the bounds of time and space, abiding in and with his followers forever.

As the Holy Spirit was seen by the baptiser as descending upon Jesus when he came up out of the water, while John baptised with water, Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:32–33).<sup>88</sup> Thus, to be born of water is insufficient; one must also be born of the Spirit and born from above (Jn 3:5–8).<sup>89</sup> Jesus gives the Spirit without limitations (v. 34). It is thus the Spirit that empowers people to worship authentically (Jn 4:23–24), and while the flesh profits nothing, the Spirit gives life and the words of Jesus are spirit and life (Jn 6:63). Jesus indeed offers pure and living water (Jn 4:10–14), and after his glorification, the Spirit will be poured out, and out of the believer's innermost being will flow rivers of living water (Jn 7:37–39). This promise indeed comes true in the gathered room, where the resurrected Lord breathes on his followers and declares, 'receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn 20:22). Thus, the empowerment of the Spirit is the basis for followers of Jesus being enabled to do even greater things than he has done (Jn 14:12), and such is the character of authentic baptism.

## ■ Prayer as asking

Again, standard words for prayer are not mentioned in the Gospel of John, but prayer as asking a petition of the Father is featured climactically within the narrative. The first incident occurs around the illness and death of Lazarus. While Jesus receives the news that Lazarus is ill, he waits before travelling to Bethany. Upon arrival, both Martha and Mary express their consternation: 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died' (Jn 11:21, 32). Nonetheless, Martha declares her faith in Jesus, that God will give him whatever he asks (v. 22). In response, Jesus declares that her brother will rise again, which leads to a clarification that he will again live in the here and now, as well as in the afterlife (vv. 23–27). Indeed, at the commanding word of Jesus, Lazarus comes forth from the tomb (vv. 43–44).

In the Farewell Discourse, Jesus invites his followers to ask in his name, assuring them that he will indeed answer their requests (Jn 14:13–14).

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88. Note that the Q tradition of Matthew and Luke adds 'and fire' to the spiritual baptism of Jesus; a number of Q-Johannine contacts are interesting (see Anderson 2014, pp. 102–126).

89. The emphasis of John 3:5 is not upon waters of purification or physical birth processes; these are not enough. The emphasis is upon '[...] and the Spirit'. Hydraulic birth is not enough; it is the pneumatic birth that really counts. Further, whereas Apollos baptised with water, following the baptism of John, the dozen new believers in Ephesus in Acts 18:24–19:7 did not know there was a Holy Spirit, which they then received as Paul rebaptised them and laid his hands upon them.



Such prayers, however, are not mere perfunctory requests; they emerge authentically out of abiding in Christ, as the branch remains in the vine (Jn 15:1-6). In such asking and receiving, the Father is glorified, as it furthers the fruition of the partnership (vv. 7-8). His followers are no longer referred to as slaves – they are now the friends of Jesus, because they know what Jesus is doing, and they obey what he instructs. He has chosen and appointed them, and the Father will answer their prayers in service to the furthering of his mission (Jn 15:12-16). In the worldly travail to come, his disciples will no longer be asking of him; they will be asking of the Father, who will grant their requests (Jn 16:23-26).

In the prayerful work of asking, confidence is expressed in Jesus asking the Father, the disciples asking Jesus and the disciples asking the Father. The guarantee of requests being granted, however, is rooted in the connectedness of agency. Because Jesus is glorifying the Father, the Father is thus glorified in granting his requests. Additionally, the Father will grant the requests of believers in order that their joy might be complete (v. 24). To ask in the name of Jesus, however, first assumes that one has been abiding in him, and that one has discerned a sense of what his will would be and what would glorify the Father. Thus, the first calling in effectual asking is attending and discerning the Lord's will. Then, in putting such conviction into a petition, believers become partners with the Lord as his friends, furthering the divine will on Earth as it is in Heaven. As Richard Foster (1978, p. 30) puts it in citing Juliana of Norwich, if one has first discerned the divine will, how can it be that it would not be granted, as it is put into a request of prayer by friends of Jesus who are praying in his name? Thus, efficacious prayer resides not in release (*if it be the Lord's will*) but is rooted in discerning conviction (*because it is the Lord's will*).

## ■ The prayers of Jesus in John

In contrast to Matthew and Luke, where the Lord's Prayer is given as a pattern for believers to follow, the Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John 17 declares the last will and testament of Jesus for his followers. It poses a vision of spirit-based unity under the Father's care – a dynamic Christocentricity. Before that, however, Jesus is presented as praying two other times in John. Before he commands Lazarus to come forth from the tomb, Jesus prays (Jn 11):

Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me. (vv. 41-42)

In crediting the Father with the miracle, the Father is thereby glorified in the final sign performed by Jesus at the culmination of his ministry. A second prayer of Jesus is uttered in the next chapter, where Jesus muses

over his impending death and his anticipated cup of suffering (Jn 12:27–30). Upon acknowledging that this is his reason for coming, he declares, ‘Father, glorify your name’. This was echoed by a voice from Heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’. Jesus then declares that this, too, was granted for the benefit of those present, inspiring their belief as a result.

While the Johannine Jesus does not teach his disciples to pray as does the Jesus of the Synoptics, some interesting parallels can be noted between the basic outline of the Lord’s Prayer in the Q tradition and the High Priestly Prayer of John 17. The similarities, though, are not linguistic – so as to suggest a literary relationship; they are thematic – perhaps reflecting the sort of praying Jesus offered more than once, or it could also reflect the developing memory of the Johannine evangelist as the praying ministry of the Lord is expanded upon within the evolving Johannine situation over the years. Nonetheless, note the intertraditional similarities of theme between the Lord’s Prayer of the Synoptics and the programmatic prayer of Jesus as a *Manifesto of Church Unity* in John 17:<sup>90</sup>

- God is addressed as Father (Mt 6:9; Lk 11:2/Jn 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25).
- The Father is holy, hallowed and righteous (Mt 6:9; Lk 11:2/Jn 17:11, 24).
- The furthering of God’s reign/kingdom/will/work on Earth is invoked (Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2/Jn 17:4–5, 22–24, 26).
- The provision of human needs (daily bread) and temporal care (joy/truth/love) is petitioned (Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3/Jn 17:9–10, 13, 17–19, 26).
- Forgiveness, eternal life, and sanctification are requested (Mt 6:12; Lk 11:4/Jn 17:2–3, 17–19).
- Protection from evil, trial, and persecution is solicited (Mt 6:13; Lk 11:4/Jn 17:11–16).

John 17 also betrays a number of intratraditional features – reminding hearers and readers of what has been said and done by Jesus in the previous narrative and outlining proleptically what will happen in the final events of the story. Interestingly, each of the ten petitions of Jesus within the prayer is preceded by the intercalation between a report on completed actions and a petition for his followers (vv. 1–3, 4–5, 6–9, 10–11, 12–13, 14–15, 16–17, 18–21, 22–24, 25–26). In so doing, a case is built for the petitions of the Lord to be granted in each instance for the pastoral benefit of believers within the developing Johannine situation. The prayer then sets the stage for the arrest, trials, torture, death and resurrection of Jesus, which are narrated in the following three chapters.

The culminative prayer of Jesus in John 17 is thus pivotal and programmatic on a number of levels. It culminates the ministry of the Lord

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90. On this and some other features of this essay, see the essay presented at the 2022 The Society for New Testament Studies (SNTS) Johannine Seminar in Leuven, Belgium (Anderson 2022).

before the Christ Events, and it completes the final section of his final discourse in John 14–17. Like a dying man’s last words, the final appeal to Heaven by Jesus punctuates the main thrusts of his overall mission, declaring his original and overall intention for the church. In that sense, the final prayer of Jesus poses a *Manifesto of Church Unity*, asking that God will keep his followers in the world but not of the world. In praying for unity, Jesus is presented as clearly addressing the later Johannine situation, where a number of fracturing tensions have been in play (Anderson 2022). When the Johannine Epistles and Apocalypse are also taken into consideration, no fewer than four crises can be identified, which are also addressed in the Johannine narrative. Following the north–south tensions between Judean religious leaders and the Galilean prophet and friendly competition with Baptist adherents (30–70 CE), the move to Asia Minor around 70 CE faced another set of challenges over two or three decades.

Firstly, tensions with Jewish family and friends in local synagogues are apparent within the Johannine writings. In the gospel, those who confess Jesus openly are remembered as having been cast out of the synagogue ‘even back then’, and those expulsions are described as a recurring and familiar crisis for later Johannine audiences (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). Pharisaic certainty over Mosaic teachings on keeping the Sabbath, allegations of blasphemy and concerns over monotheism are especially pronounced in John 5 and 7–10. If Jesus-adherents were indeed distanced from local synagogues, it appears that some of them have been proselytised back into the synagogue, as reflected in 1 John 2:18–25. Then again, if some have simply abandoned First-Day worship in Gentile believers’ house churches, it need not imply synagogue expulsion scenarios. Labelled pejoratively as ‘Antichrists’, those who have left the community refused to believe that Jesus was the Christ, perhaps in adherence to Jewish monotheism. However, the Elder warns that if they reject the Son, they will forfeit the Father, but if they embrace the Son, the Father’s pleasure will remain.<sup>91</sup> In Revelation, those claiming to be Jews are not; Johannine believers are the true faithful of Israel (Rv 2:9; 3:9). Thus, the Johannine identity is radically Jewish, and tensions with οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (most often rendered ‘the Judeans’, but at times more generally – and never negatively – rendered ‘the Jews’) reflect intrafaith debates rather than interfaith polemics.<sup>92</sup>

Secondly, while tensions with imperial Rome continued throughout the entire first-century CE, they became more acute under the reign of Domitian

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91. Note the emphasis on the Father-Son relationship within the Johannine situation (Anderson 1999).

92. In my view, the Gospel of John is not anti-Jewish and certainly not anti-Semitic. Such judgments throughout church history – also yoked to political agendas by non-religious leaders – are exegetically flawed. Instead, John is radically Jewish, arguing for the heart of Judaism as Paul argued for its boundaries (Anderson 2017, pp. 265–311).

(81–96 CE), as Domitian instituted the requirement of public emperor laud, involving the offering of incense or an animal sacrifice to Caesar and claiming Caesar is Lord. Some two decades later, Pliny complains to Trajan about the expectation that he should put to death those refusing to worship Caesar or to deny Christ (*Letters* 10.96–97). Against these tensions with Rome, Thomas is presented as making a culminative, anti-Domitian confession: ‘My Lord and my God!’ (Jn 20:28). As Domitian required even his lieutenants to regard him in those terms, this statement is clearly an anti-Domitian confession (Cassidy [1992] 2015). Likewise, in the Johannine Christ-hymn, Jesus is the divine Son, *not* Caesar, and Pilate is presented as having no clue about the truth (Jn 18:38). In addition to admonishing the faithful to ‘love not the world’ nor its enticements in 1 John 2:15–18, the last word of the Epistle rebukes emperor worship and pagan festivals (Jn 5:21): ‘Little children, stay away from idols!’ In addition to requiring emperor worship, the Romans also encouraged the celebration of local religious customs and festivals, attaching imperial features to local pagan traditions. And, of course, the entire book of Revelation is crafted as an affront to the imperial cult under the reign of Domitian. It is Christ who holds seven stars in his hand, *not* Domitian (Rv 1:16); the second beast (Domitian) is even worse than the first one (Nero; Ch. 13); and the Lamb’s War will finally defeat the murderous work of the empire (Jn 17:14).

Thirdly, the second and third references to Antichrists in the Johannine Epistles, however, differ from the first. In 1 John 4:1–3 and 2 John 7, significant differences from the first threat are apparent. Rather than a secession, this crisis is an invasion; rather than a past event, this crisis is impending and future; rather than denying Jesus being the Jewish Messiah-Christ, these false teachers deny that he came in the flesh. No. The second anti-christic threat is thus different from the first, and it reflects the assimilative teachings of Gentile believers who likely felt no need to adhere to such Jewish convictions as refusing imperial or pagan worship rites and rejecting meat offered to idols, including associated sexual immorality. If refusing the imperial cult should lead to penalisation – perhaps even capital punishment – the later material in the Johannine Gospel features incarnational and martyrological thrusts. If Jesus did not suffer, neither need his followers; the attraction of Docetism was cheap grace and easy discipleship. The Word became *flesh* (Jn 1:14); faithful disciples must *ingest his flesh and blood* (Jn 6:51–58); the eyewitness saw *water and blood* flowing from his side (Jn 19:34–35); and Peter’s *martyrdom* is foretold (Jn 21:18–19).<sup>93</sup> In 1 John, *water, blood and the Spirit* testify to the sacrifice of Jesus and its

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93. Thus, the existentially nourishing bread that Jesus gives is his suffering and dying flesh, on the cross, which his followers must ingest – the way of the cross – if they expect to share with him the promise of resurrected life (Jn 6:27, 48–66; Anderson [1996] 2010).

efficacious example (1 Jn 5:6–8). In Revelation, false teachers leading people to eating meat offered to idols and fornication are addressed (Rv 2:14, 20), and the goddess Roma, who is drunk with the blood of the saints, will finally be held accountable at the end (Jn 17:6).

Fourthly, the leaders within Johannine Christianity also find themselves at odds in some ways with rising institutionalism in the late first-century situation. As a means of dealing with these same three general issues, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch appropriate the teachings of Matthew 16:17–19 in calling for the appointing of one bishop in every church, who will deal with heretics and divisions, furthering church unity by means of hierarchical male leadership. Against such innovations, the Johannine Gospel calls forth a more primitive, egalitarian and familial ecclesiology, as flock and vine are referenced as opposed to more petrified images (Jn 10:1–18; 15:1–8); Peter affirms the sole authority of Jesus (returning the keys to Jesus?; Jn 6:68–69); the Holy Spirit is available to all (chs. 14–16); and Jesus appoints and inspires his followers (plural) to be his apostolic successors (Jn 20:21–23). In 3 John, the Elder has written to ‘the church’ (Antioch?) about the abuse of episcopal authority by Diotrephes, the primacy-lover, who is excluding Johannine visitors from his fellowship and is willing to expel from his church any who take them in. Nonetheless, the Elder will follow the accountability guidelines of Matthew 18:15–17 in speaking with Diotrephes directly. He then finalises the Fourth Gospel after the death of the Beloved Disciple and circulates it among the churches as a presentation of the original intentionality of Jesus for the church (Anderson 2007b, pp. 6–41, [1996] 2010). And, in Revelation, it is Christ who holds the keys to life and death, not Peter (Rv 1:18).

In light of these fracturing tensions and centrifugal forces within Johannine Christianity, the majestic prayer of Jesus calls for unity under the dynamic leadership of the Risen Lord. While not all of these issues are addressed directly, the prayer for unity comes through as a *Manifesto of Church Unity* near the turn of the first-century CE. Parallel to but different from the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew and Luke, which begins with hallowing the name of the heavenly Father, the prayer of the Johannine Jesus begins with the request that the Father will now glorify the Son, who has completed the Father’s mission faithfully and efficaciously (Jn 17):

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. (vv. 1–2)

After all, the Son has glorified the Father through his missional agency, inviting the same level of glorification that the Son and the Father had known before the world existed (vv. 4–5). This pre-existent relationship is echoed in the Johannine Christ-hymn, as well (Jn 1:1–3).

The next point declares the source of eternal life, sounded throughout the Fourth Gospel, which involves a relationship of intimacy with the Son and the Father, effected by a response of faith to the divine initiative (Jn 17:3): ‘And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’. In that sense, a central theme of the narrative is sounded again with force: out of God’s love for the world, the Son is sent in order that all who believe might experience the gift of eternal life, beginning in the present and continuing into the afterlife (Jn 1:4; 3:15–16, 36; 4:13–14, 36; 5:24; 6:27, 35, 40, 47–48, 54, 63, 68; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 20:31). Life-producing faith is a factor of knowing the Father and the Son (Jn 14:6–7; 17:3, 25–26), and *knowledge about* is not the same as *intimate acquaintance with*. As the Shepherd of the sheep, his true sheep know the voice of Jesus, and he also knows them (Jn 10:3–4, 14–15, 27). And indeed, Jesus will also invite sheep beyond the present fold to follow him; and they too will recognise his voice, creating one flock under one Shepherd (v. 16). Further, it is by their knowing the will of Jesus and obeying it that his followers become his partners as friends, and such is also what empowers them to love one another in unity (Jn 15:12–17). Therefore, one of the central interests of the culminative prayer of Jesus is ethical and missional – calling for loving patience and the extension of grace within the community (Adams 2022).

A third emphasis within the last will and testament of Jesus for the church<sup>94</sup> is the conviction that his faithful community is living under the word that he has entrusted them (Jn 17:6–8). Jesus has revealed the Father’s Word to them, and they have accepted and obeyed his words. Additionally, rather than being subjugated to a hierarchical structure of governance, Johannine believers are open to leadings of the Spirit, which may be discerned and conveyed by women as well as men and by the young as well as the old. These may have even been reasons for why Diotrephes was averse to travelling Johannine ministers visiting his community. Their egalitarian, familial form of governance – abiding under the living word of the Risen Lord through the Holy Spirit – might have posed a threat to his loving of hierarchical primacy [ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων] as a means of holding his church together. Within Hellenistic society, however, because Jesus has given them the Father’s Word, the world has hated them. Just as the world has hated Jesus, it has also hated his followers. Therefore, Jesus prays for his followers and sanctifies them in the truth, just as he also is set apart for the truth. As he has been sent in to the world by the Father, so Jesus also sends his own into the world as his agents of revelation and reconciliation (vv. 14–19).

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94. The language of Ernst Käsemann ([1966] 2017) with a critical introduction by Paul N. Anderson.

The fourth emphasis follows, in relation to the hatred and hardship that Jesus-adherents are facing in the hostile world. Jesus thus asks on behalf of his followers that they be protected in the world – kept in the world but not of the world – not just his immediate followers, but those also who will follow in their wake (vv. 9, 15-17). Especially if Jews and followers of Jesus are being targeted by the Flavian Emperors, culminating with Domitian's requirement of emperor laud, the hatred of the world would indeed be palpable during the last three decades of the first-century CE. While Jews were required to give two drachmas annually to the temple of Jupiter Capitolina in Rome (the same amount that was the Jewish tithe-tax, given annually to the Jerusalem temple), Gentile believers and those distanced from the synagogue would be expected to offer sacrifices to Caesar or to suffer the penalty. Economic factors also prevailed. If Jesus-adherents objected to idolatry and associated businesses and industries, they also would have harboured disdain for believers, as their businesses and guilds were being damaged by the growth of the Jesus movement. While Jesus is grateful that none had been killed or lost during his ministry (v. 12), his concern for their safety is embraced into the future. Thus, the prayer for protection and safe-keeping of believers in the world in John 17 would have been acutely relevant within the later Johannine situation.

The fifth emphasis is on how the overall prayer of Jesus for unity among his followers is completely understandable, as he prays that his followers would be one, just as he and the Father are one (v. 11). In addition, Jesus prays not only for his immediate followers but also for those who will believe in later generations because of their faithfulness (v. 20). The importance of their unity, being one as he and the Father are one, is not simply of value for internal harmony; it is also a sign to the world that they might believe that Jesus is authentically sent from the Father (v. 21). On this matter, part of the larger missional concern is reflected in the concern for unity. If church secessions and false teachings have damaged the reputation of the beloved community, this would also be a setback to its outreach. It might even serve as a basis for the likes of Diotrephes and his kin (3 Jn 9-10) to exclude Johannine believers from fellowship, perhaps feeling that the familiar and egalitarian of the community lived under the Word was old-fashioned and ineffective over the long haul. Yet, the Johannine witness is clear that the Christ-centred appeal to loving one another – including men, women and children – reflects the original ethos of Jesus to be embraced and embodied by later generations of his followers. Thus, the final words of the Lord's Prayer in John 17 are sounded with missional clarity:

I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them. (v. 26)

## ■ Conclusion

In contrast to the Synoptics, the Johannine Jesus does not teach his disciples how to pray; he simply encourages them to ask, promising that their petitions would be granted, and his final prayer outlines the original intention of Jesus for his followers and friends as a *Manifesto of Church Unity*. In the Gospel of John, however, prayer is thus a central element within the human-divine dialogue – a response to the divine initiative – which embraces that which is of divine origin over and against creaturely scaffolding and activity: human-made religion. Prayer is thus a central element of authentic worship, which transcends the bounds of place and form; it is ever in spirit and in truth, and after such worshippers the Father actively seeks. As such, the Johannine evangel poses a corrective to rising institutionalism in the late first-century situation, promoting authentic worship, inclusive and compassionate ministry, an incarnational sacramentology and an egalitarian and spirit-based approach to church organisation and leadership (Anderson 1991, pp. 27–43, 2005, pp. 3–39, 2011, pp. 221–235).<sup>95</sup>

The mission of Jesus is thus intrinsically centred within his prophetic agency from the Father, and this agency is also extended to the Holy Spirit and to believers. As such, the Holy Spirit continues in and with the lives of believers, guiding them into truth and bringing to presence what is needed for the moment regarding the relevant teachings of Jesus. Jesus invites his followers to ask in his name, assuring that such prayers will be answered. He then closes his Farewell Discourse with the programmatic prayer of the Lord as a *Manifesto of Church Unity* for the larger Jesus movement toward the end of the first-century CE, while also featuring a more primitive ecclesial memory of Jesus and his spirit-based, discernment-oriented, female-including and love-based approach to ecclesial operation and Christian unity.

Within that prayer, Jesus prays that the Father will glorify his ministry by blessing his followers. True life is found in knowing the Father and the one he has sent (Jn 17:1–3). Thus, authentic spirituality is found within the intimacy of a loving relationship – knowing and being known by the Father and the Son – in the unity of agency. While the world has hated the Son, so will it also hate his followers; thus, Jesus prays that the Father will protect and keep believers in the world, but not of the world (Jn 17:11–19). Such must have been all the more difficult under the imperial cult in Asia Minor in the late first-century CE, and amidst defections and the false teachings of travelling ministers, Jesus prays that God will make his follower one,

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95. See also my response (Anderson 2005) to Cardinal Kasper's request for ways forward in a potential new day for Christian unity, which I delivered to him and Pope Benedict XVI in October 2006.



as he and the Father are one, that the world will know and believe that he is authentically commissioned and sent by the Father as the Messiah/Christ (vv. 20-26). Finally, what we see in the Johannine presentation of authentic spirituality is the desire for God to glorify the Son by protecting and empowering believers in unity during the throes of acute tensions, defections and invasions.

In so doing, though, prayer in the Fourth Gospel is presented not as humans moving the powers of the deity toward action. No. Effectual prayer grows out of an intimate relationship with the divine – a factor of authentic spirituality – whereby even being able to pray in the name of Jesus reflects first having discerned the will of Christ, within the human-divine relationship. As Thomas Kelly (1941) has put so well:

In this humanistic age we suppose man is the initiator and God is the responder. But the living Christ within us is the initiator and we are the responders. God the Lover, the accuser, the *Revealer* of light and darkness presses within us. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'. And all our apparent initiative is already a response, a testimonial to His secret presence and working within us. (pp. 29-30)

# Prayer and worship in the early church according to Acts

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## ■ Introduction<sup>96</sup>

The book of Acts narrates the transition of Jesus' ministry and the spread of the gospel by Jesus of Nazareth, as the primary agent, to his apostles as first-generation representatives of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. The literary unity between Luke and Acts is characterised by a continuation of not only the larger flow of the narrative but also the themes of prayer and worship. It stands central to Jesus' own ministry in the Gospel

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96. For the purposes of this contribution, I make use of the literary-critical methodological framework of narrative criticism. This methodology approaches a narrative biblical text (such as the Acts of the Apostles) in its entirety, interprets the text as a literary product with particular literary features (e.g. implied author, implied readers, an ordering of narrative events, characterisation and a plot), and makes assumptions about a normative process of reading. See Powell (2010, pp. 240–258) for a concise overview of narrative criticism as a literary approach to biblical studies, as well as suggestions for further reading on this methodology.

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of Luke and, subsequently, also in the lives of those who follow Jesus, as portrayed in Acts.<sup>97</sup>

The Gospel of Luke contains a fair number of references concerning prayer – whether commandments or instructions about prayer or narrations of the content of prayers (cf. Lk 5:16; 6:12; 6:28; 18:1; 18:10–14; 20:47; 22:32; 22:40, 46; 22:44). This pattern continues in the Acts of the Apostles, where the closest followers of Jesus and those who join the growing communities, later known as Christians, also regularly spend time in prayer and in worship. This continuation between the Gospel of Luke and Acts is undergirded by the centrality of prayer in the writings of the Old Testament (OT), affirming the Jewish roots of the early Jesus movement. As such, the Jewish tradition which proclaimed and held on to the promise of the coming of the Messiah set the tone for the way in which the Messianic figure himself will act, and subsequently also his followers.<sup>98</sup>

The centrality of prayer and worship settings in the book of Acts is also framed by the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts of the Roman Empire and of cultic worship, which permeated life in all its dimensions in the empire and the ancient Mediterranean world of the first centuries CE (cf. Kuhn 2015, pp. 17–20). To see or hear Jesus followers participating in physical expressions of prayer and worship would not have been in and of itself unique to the Christian movement at the time. However, worshipping a deity whom one claims to be the Son of God, Jesus Christ – who was crucified and raised from the dead, a deity who cannot be contained in a statue or who does not hold the title of Caesar – that would have at the very least been an oddity, if not met with resistance. Therefore, the persecution and opposition to the witness and worship of Jesus' followers in the book of Acts is a logical consequence. This is a poignant reminder of the intricate and precarious relationship between politics and religion.<sup>99</sup>

The centrality of prayer and the role of worship for the communities of Jesus' followers are never contested in the Acts of the Apostles. This is not surprising, given that it does not serve in the first place as a treatise arguing a systematic theological case for prayer and worship; rather, it testifies in a narrative style to a range of expressions of life as a follower of Jesus Christ, and especially so as part of a community – a movement initially rooted

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97. I side with the majority of biblical scholars on such literary unity between the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, based especially on inner textual evidence.

98. Hagner (2012, pp. 324–344) describes Acts as a book of key transitions, with specific reference to theology, from the incarnate Lord to the indwelling Spirit; religion, from Jewish worship to Christian worship; and geography, from Asia to Rome.

99. Acts 17:16 onwards provides a glimpse into the world of cultic worship and idolatry in the ancient Mediterranean context. For an insightful perspective on the role of the empire in the book of Acts, especially from a gender and postcolonial perspective, see Penner and Vander Stichele (2007, pp. 232–266).

firmly in Jewish traditions and faith practices, which increasingly also reached Gentile audiences.<sup>100</sup> Mention of prayers, the act of praying and worship are narrated throughout the book of Acts – literally starting in the first chapter in an upper room (Ac 1:14) and ending in the last in Rome (implied in Ac 28:31)!

In view of these brief introductory comments, I turn to a detailed discussion of prayer and worship in the Acts of the Apostles, with a particular emphasis on prayer as an expression of worship. I focus on narrative reports and depictions of prayer as found in the book of Acts – whether they take place in an explicit worship setting or not – and a few instances where prayer or worship is assumed but not necessarily named. The discussion consists of three parts. Firstly, I list all textual occurrences relating to the semantic domains of prayer, the act of praying and places of prayer. I also include implied occurrences of prayer or worship, based on the narrative setting of the text. Secondly, I distinguish the contours of these occurrences collectively, guided by four questions:

1. who prays (agency)
2. when and where do prayers take place (locations and timing)
3. what is prayed (theme or types of prayers)
4. what the substance or record of prayers (content) is.

Thirdly, based on these contours, I suggest what the unique perspectives and theological contribution of prayer and worship in the Acts of the Apostles may be from a Biblical Theological perspective.

## ■ Overview of occurrences of prayer and worship in Acts

For the purposes of this chapter, the identification and selection of occurrences of prayer and worship in Acts is guided by three semantic domains relating to prayer: εὐχομαι [to pray, prayer] (Louw & Nida 33:178); προσευχή [place of prayer] (Louw & Nida 33:179); and ἐνθή [vow] (Louw & Nida 33.469). In what follows, these occurrences are briefly described.

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100. The narration of the expansion of the gospel in the book of Acts can be distinguished by geographical location: Acts 1:15-8:3 – the establishment of the church in Jerusalem; Acts 8:4-11:18 – the expansion of the gospel to Samaria; Acts 11:19-15:35 – the expansion of the gospel to Antioch, Paul's first missionary trip, the first church meeting in Jerusalem; Acts 15:36-21:26 – Paul's second and third missionary trips (expansion of the gospel to Greece); Acts 21:27-28:31 – Paul was taken captive in Jerusalem, Paul's hearings, travel to Rome, gospel in Rome. Such a geographical developmental approach has been one popular option for scholars in their attempts to outline the macrostructure of Acts. According to Liefeld (1995, pp. 36-48) other types of structural patterns for Acts include socio-ethnic; cultural frontiers; Peter and Paul; speeches; alternating patterns; allocation of space; and summary statements.

■ **Louw and Nida (1996, p. 408): 33.178 εὔχομαι<sup>a</sup>; προσεύχομαι; εὐχή<sup>a</sup>, ἥς f: προσευχή<sup>a</sup>, ἥς f: ‘to speak to or to make requests of God’ – ‘to pray, to speak to God, to ask God for, prayer’**

The first mention of prayer is found in Acts 1:14, referring to the eleven disciples listed in Verse 13, along with the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and the brothers of Jesus, who ‘continued steadfastly with one mind in prayer’ in the upper room in Jerusalem after Jesus’ ascension. Shortly after, in Acts 1:24, a prayer is offered by this same group in view of the planned replacement of Judas before the lots were cast to determine who will be elected. This is one of a few instances in Acts where the content of the prayer is narrated (i.e. recorded).

The believers who accepted Peter’s message about Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost ‘continued steadfastly in the teachings of the apostles, in fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers’ (Ac 2:42). It is interesting to note the parallel of the phrase ‘continued steadfastly’, which was first used in describing the disciples in the upper room (Ac 1:14). When Peter and John make their way to the temple in Acts 3:1, it is stated that they were specifically going ‘at the hour of the prayer – the ninth hour’. However, when Peter answers the lame man at the temple gate and proclaims his healing, no mention is made of prayer taking place, either before or after the healing.

In Acts 6:1-4, the Twelve select seven co-workers in reaction to the Grecian Jews who complained against the Aramaic-speaking community, saying that their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution of food. After the election, the Twelve state explicitly that the co-workers will be assigned to take up this office, and that they will give their attention ‘to prayer and the ministry of the word’ (Ac 6:4). After presenting the elected seven co-workers to the whole group of apostles, the group ‘prayed and laid their hands on them’ (Ac 6:6). This is the first mention of prayer being accompanied by a physical (bodily) act.

This is followed by two episodes in which prayer and healing seem to coincide. The first includes the laying on of hands, and the second the act of kneeling. When Peter and John arrived in Samaria after hearing that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they (Ac 8):

[P]rayered for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them [...] Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (vv. 14-17)

In Acts 9:11, Ananias is commanded by the Lord to go to the house of Judas to find the blind Saul, who ‘is praying’. After a bit of resistance, Ananias is commanded by the Lord to go, and he obeys. He enters the house and

places his hands on Saul. He confirms to Saul that it is Jesus who appeared to him on the road and who has sent him to the house of Judas so that he may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ac 9:13-17). His proclamation is directed at Saul and no prayer is recorded or reported, but it can likely be assumed that it formed part of the laying on of hands and his fulfilment with the Holy Spirit. Paul is healed, stands up, is baptised and breaks his fast that seems to have accompanied his acts of praying (Ac 9:18).

While in Lydda, Peter is urgently called to go to Joppa, where the disciple Tabitha (Dorcas) was sick and dying. After making his way to the upper room where her body was, he sent all the crying widows out of the room, knelt and prayed, turned to her body and commanded her to get up. She opened her eyes, saw Peter and sat up, after which he presented her alive to the believers and the widows (Ac 9:36-42). Interesting to note, in contrast, is the fact that the narrative of Peter's healing of the paralysed Aeneas in Lydia, just before this scene, makes no mention of prayer (Ac 9:32-35). However, in both cases, the healings resulted in belief among those who heard of it.

In Acts 10 we are introduced to Cornelius and his devout and God-fearing household. He has a 'supernatural' visionary experience and is visited by an angel who relays a message from God to him. This message confirms what the reader was told in Verse 2, namely that Cornelius gave generously to those in need and 'prayed' (literally 'petitioned') continually to God. The angel thus says, 'Your prayers and our alms went up as a memorial/as remembrance before God [...]' (Ac 10:4). Thereafter, he receives his assignment and acts accordingly. The visionary experiences continue, and this time it is Peter's turn. 'At about the sixth hour the following day', as Cornelius' men were drawing close to the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray (Ac 10:9). Whether he prayed before his vision is not stated here, nor what the content of his prayer was if he did pray beforehand. After the vision, Peter meets up with the men, invites them into the house as his guests, and sets out to Caesarea with them the next day. They arrive at Cornelius' house, where a group of relatives and close friends are already gathered. After the two men talked, Peter goes inside and asks Cornelius why he has sent for him. Cornelius tells of the vision he had 'while praying at the ninth hour' (Ac 10:30) and describes the words of the angel concerning his prayers and alms (Ac 10:31). Peter reacts with a speech, and the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message - whether circumcised or Gentiles. They were heard 'speaking in tongues and praising God' (Ac 10:44-46) and baptised with water shortly after (Ac 10:48). Peter returns to a disgruntled group of circumcised believers in Jerusalem. Now it is his turn to tell of his vision, stating that he was 'in the city Joppa praying' when he received the vision (Ac 11:5). Thus, it is now confirmed that he did, indeed, pray - however, the content of his prayer is still not stated.

After Peter's imprisonment by order of King Herod, during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, the first instance of intercession is narrated: 'So Peter was kept in prison; but the church was earnestly praying to God concerning him' (Ac 12:5). Not long thereafter, Peter is miraculously released from prison (Ac 12:6-11). Eager to return to his community, he makes his way to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, 'where many people had gathered and were praying' (Ac 12:12). The servant girl Rhoda's news about Peter's return initially falls on deaf ears, but finally he can join them and relays his extraordinary prison escape story (Ac 12:15-17).

In Acts 13:2, the church at Antioch is busy 'worshipping the Lord and fasting' when the Holy Spirit instructs them to 'set apart' Barnabas and Saul for the work to which they have been called. 'So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off' (Ac 13:3). Again, no content concerning the prayer is provided. Paul and Barnabas follow a similar pattern when they appoint elders in every church in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. While praying and fasting, 'they committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust' (Ac 14:23).

Even imprisonment does not stop Paul and Silas from praying and worshipping God. When they find themselves in prison in Philippi after healing the fortune-telling slave girl, the other prisoners listen, though it is close to midnight (Ac 16:25). Another miraculous prison break takes place, and the jailer and his whole family subsequently came to the faith and were baptised (Ac 16:26-36).

In Acts 20:17-38, we find one of the more emotional narrative episodes of Paul's ministry. He summons the elders of Ephesus to Miletus and delivers his farewell speech to them before continuing his journey to Jerusalem. After sharing his words, 'he knelt down with all of them and he prayed' (Ac 20:35). This is followed by weeping, embraces and kisses, as they tried to come to terms with the fact that they will never see him again once they see him off at the ship (Ac 20:37-38). Shortly thereafter, upon leaving Tyre, Paul and those travelling with him were escorted out of the city by 'everyone with (their) wives and children'. On the shore, they 'knelt and prayed' (Ac 21:5).

Paul shares his testimony in Jerusalem with the crowd. Among others, he refers to his experience of falling into a trance previously when in Jerusalem, while he was praying (Ac 22:17). Upon hearing the words that the Lord spoke to him, the crowd cannot restrain themselves any longer and demand Paul's death (Ac 22:18-22). Appearing before King Agrippa, Paul commits to praying not only for the King - whether for a short or a long time - but also 'for all those hearing me today to become what I am, except for these chains' (Ac 26:29). He thus makes a commitment of intercession for those who do not yet believe, including the political power figure before him.

In Acts 27:29, the only example of fearful prayer in a situation of explicit physical danger is reported. Paul and his co-workers find themselves on a ship in stormy waters. 'Fearing that somewhere against the rocks we would be thrown overboard, they dropped four anchors and prayed for daylight' (Ac 27:29).

In the final chapter of the book, a last healing narrative is told. The father of the chief official of Malta, Publius, was ill in bed, 'suffering from fever attacks and dysentery' (Ac 28:8). This time, Paul does not only speak about prayer to a political power figure. He goes to the father, 'prayed, put his hands on him and cured him' (Ac 28:8). In return, he is cared for by the residents of the island.

■ **Louw and Nida (1996, p. 408): 33.179 προσευχή<sup>b</sup>, ἦς f: - Derivative of προσεύχομαι 'to pray' and 33.178 a place where people customarily meet to pray - 'A place for prayer'**

Only two references to 'a place of prayer' are found in Acts, and both are in Chapter 16. Such mention of a place of prayer, rather than mention of a synagogue, most likely indicates that there was no synagogue in Philippi, and therefore an unofficial place of prayer had been identified outside of the city (cf. Bruce 1980, p. 331).<sup>101</sup> In Acts 16:13, Paul and his companions find themselves in Philippi: 'On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected a place of prayer to be'. Here they sat down and spoke to the women gathered - who were perhaps already praying themselves? However, no further detail is provided. This serves as an introduction to their meeting with Lydia, who was part of the group of women listening to them.

In Acts 16:16, Paul, Silas and their companions are still in Philippi. They are again on their way to 'the place of prayer' when they meet the slave girl possessed by 'a spirit of a python'. Besides Paul's command to the spirit a few days later, upon which the girl is healed, there is no mention of prayer, laying on of hands or kneeling - all elements which have previously formed part of healings in one way or the other.

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101. This reference to 'a place of prayer' also provides the implied reader with clues to the gender compilation of this faith community: a minimum of ten Jewish men would have been sufficient for constituting a synagogue; Jewish women could not replace any of these men. It can be assumed, then, that there were very few Jewish men in Philippi, an unspecified number of Jewish women and likely also God-fearing Gentiles (Bruce 1980, p. 331; De Villiers 1983, p. 44). There are, however, scholars such as Reimer who argue that this place of prayer was a synagogue (Squires 2003, p. 1246).



■ **Louw and Nida (1996, p. 441): 33.469 εὐχή<sup>b</sup>, ἦς f: a promise to God that one will do something, with the implication that failure to act accordingly will result in divine sanctions against the person in question - ‘Vow’**

Only twice in Acts does a reference to a holy promise or a vow to God occur. In Acts 18:18 and 21:23, mention is made of a specific ‘vow’ that had been taken by Paul and by four men. This most likely refers to some form of the temporary Nazarite vow, which entailed a period of devotion and fasting after which one’s hair would be cut off or shaved off.<sup>102</sup> In part, this would demonstrate Paul’s commitment to the law (rather than his opposition to it), which was important to the Jewish leaders and communities.

■ **Implied occurrences of prayer and worship (based on narrative setting)<sup>103</sup>**

Even if not being stated explicitly, there are several instances where prayer and worship are alluded to or are very likely part of the narrative of Acts or indicated with lemmas other than the three discussed above.

In Acts 2:4, the speaking of tongues with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is narrated. Although prayer is not explicitly stated, it may be assumed that this was a form of prayer. When the characteristics of the first congregation are described later in Acts 2, it is noted that ‘they continued steadfastly to meet together in the temple [...] praising God’ (Ac 2:46–47).<sup>104</sup>

After the lame man was healed (Ac 3:8–9), he enters the temple with Peter and John, ‘praising’ God. Such ‘praising’ does not include prayer with certainty, yet it still falls within the realm of worship and prayer.

Although the *noun* ‘prayer’ or the *verb* ‘to pray’ does not appear in 4:24, the believers are said to have responded to Peter and John’s release by ‘raising their voices’ to God. In Acts 4:23–31, one finds the only instance of prayer in Acts where the book of Psalms is quoted; in almost all other

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102. Detail about the Nazarite vow is provided in Numbers 6:1–21. This vow was a way in which laypeople (both male and female) could embody something of the holiness intrinsic to priestly ministry, but only for a limited time and with very specific rules (cf. Budd 2003, p. 133).

103. Such identification of implied occurrences of prayer and worship is highly dependent on the interpreter, and it may well be that other readers identify more or other depictions in their reading of Acts.

104. Powell (2000, p. 1391) comments on the relationship between Christian worship and participation in the sacred meal, as depicted in the New Testament (cf. Ac 2:46, ‘the breaking of the bread’). This meal seems to have shared features with both Jewish festivals and Hellenistic symposia.

instances these quotations occur in speeches.<sup>105</sup> The psalms included in this pericope are Psalm 2:1-2 and Psalm 146:6. Psalm 2:1-2 is applied to Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city in relation to Jesus. The prayer is a petition for servants to be able to speak in boldness and for healing in the name of Jesus. A seismic reaction follows their prayer and they are filled with the Holy Spirit. This episode is followed by the second description of life in the community (Ac 4:32-33).

After his appearance and extensive testimony before the Sanhedrin, Stephan is dragged outside of the city to be executed. While being stoned, he 'cries out' twice to the Lord Jesus, addressing him directly, and strongly echoes the prayer of Jesus before his crucifixion (Ac 7:59-60). This murder took place with Saul's approval and sparked severe persecution of the congregation in Jerusalem - of which Saul was a primary advocate.

In Acts 8:22-24, a conversation between Peter and Simon takes place after Simon offered money for the ability to also invoke the spiritual powers of laying on of hands and the subsequent fulfilment with the Holy Spirit. Peter reprimands Simon strongly and instructs him to 'repent' and to 'petition' the Lord for forgiveness. However, Simon then asks Peter to 'petition' on his behalf, and no mention is further made of whether this was done. This scene reminds strongly of the intercessory role of priests in the Jewish tradition.

In Acts 12:23, a gruesome consequence of the lack of worship of God is described: meeting with the people, Herod dies publicly after being struck down by an angel of the Lord, is eaten by worms and passes away. This because he did not give 'praise' to God.

Before leaving for Macedonia, Paul 'exhorted' the disciples. He travelled the area and often 'exhorted' those whom he met on the way to Greece (Ac 20:1-3). It could be assumed that prayers accompanied these words of encouragement, both toward the disciples and to the people during his travels.

When Paul testifies in Jerusalem about the impact of the ministry to the Gentiles, those present among James and the elders 'praised God' (Ac 21:20). One could assume that these expressions of praise included prayers of thanksgiving. The next day, Paul accompanies the four men who took a 'vow' to the temple. Here they participate in 'purification rites', and Paul gives notice of the date of completion of purification and when the

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105. Squires (2003, p. 1225) states that the substance of this prayer indicates that it has the same function as that of the speeches delivered up to this point in the narrative, namely, 'it expounds the sovereignty of God in events reported through explicit and implicit language about God'.

offering for each of them will be made (Ac 21:26). Again, it can be assumed that prayers would be part of these purification rites.<sup>106</sup>

Finally, in Acts 28:30–31, reference is made to the two years Paul spent under house arrest in Rome. During this time, he welcomed all who visited him, ‘proclaiming’ the kingdom of God and ‘teaching’ the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with boldness and unhindered. Such proclamations and teachings would very likely have included prayers and other expressions of worship.

## ■ Analysis of occurrences

The large number of occurrences of explicit and implicit references to prayer and worship in Acts requires some form of ordering to discern patterns. As such, it becomes increasingly possible to get an overall perspective on the depictions of prayer and worship in Acts and, finally, also to ask what the unique perspectives and contributions of Acts could be for a Biblical Theology of prayer.

For such an ordering, I propose four categories:

1. agency (who prays)
2. location and timing (when and where do prayers take place)
3. theme or type (what is prayed)
4. content (substance or recording of prayer).

## □ Agency: Who prays?

In Acts, it would appear as if three types of agents are involved in prayer: specific individuals (mentioned by name); apostles and particular groups of believers (often leaders); and whole congregations (communal prayer).

Individuals mentioned by name include Peter (Ac 3:1; 8:14–17; 9:36–42; 10:9; 11:5); John (Ac 3:1; 8:14–17), Ananias (Ac 9:13–17); Cornelius (and his household) (Ac 10:2, 4, 30, 31); Paul (Ac 9:18; 14:23; 16:25, 20:35; 21:5; 22:17; 26:29; 27:29; 28:8); Barnabas (Ac 14:23); and Silas (Ac 16:25). Prayer could be implied as a response by the lame man at the temple, after his healing (Ac 3:8–9), Stephan’s outcries before his death (Ac 7:59–60), Paul’s exhortations upon leaving for Macedonia and during his travels to Greece (Ac 20:1–3) and Paul’s time in Rome, spent under house arrest (Ac 28:30–31).

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106. Cf. footnote 102, in the ‘Louw & Nida (1996:441): 33.469 εὐχῆ<sup>b</sup>, ἦς f: a promise to God that one will do something, with the implication that failure to act accordingly will result in divine sanctions against the person in question - ‘vow’ section, referring to a period of devotion and fasting after which one’s hair would be cut off or shaved off.

As for specific groups of believers who pray, these include those in the upper room in Jerusalem (Ac 1:13-14); the group present at the election of the seven co-workers (Ac 6:6); those present at the house of Cornelius who received the Holy Spirit (Ac 10:44-46); those present at the house of Mary the mother of John Mark (Ac 12:12); the elders of Ephesus who visited Paul at Miletus (Ac 20:35); the believers in Tyre (including wives and children, Paul and his co-travellers) (Ac 21:5); and Paul and his co-workers during the storm at sea (Ac 27:29). Although not explicitly stated as praying, it may be assumed that the Jewish women of Philippi (Ac 16:13) would have been praying; so too those present among James and the elders in Jerusalem (Ac 21:20); and the four men who took a vow and whom Paul accompanied to the temple (Ac 21:26).

In a larger communal setting, mention is made of prayers (collectively) offered by those who came to faith on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:42); the church praying for Peter when he was imprisoned (Ac 12:5); and the church of Antioch, who were instructed to set apart Barnabas and Saul (Ac 13:2-3). The worship setting of the first congregation strongly assumes prayer (Ac 2:46-47), as well as the petition offered by the believers in Acts 4:23-31.

### □ **Location and timing: Where and when do prayers take place?**

Although there are references to typical (traditional Jewish) places of prayer in Acts, many prayers seem to take place in occasional settings. This ties in with the shift in Acts from an initial focus on Jewish audiences to Gentile audiences, as well as an understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit, which extends the temporal understanding of God's indwelling from the temple to the believer at all times and everywhere.<sup>107</sup> Thus, prayer does not have to take place (only) at particular times and in specific settings – this is illustrated clearly in Acts.<sup>108</sup> With reference to communal settings of worship, Powell (2000, p. 1391) notes that although the daily gathering of Christians for worship is mentioned in Acts (2:46), it also seems as if there was a preference for 'the first day of the week' (Ac 20:7) (at least in some communities).

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107. Elliott (1991, p. 216) argues that a shift occurs from the temple to the household in Acts. From Acts 8:1 onwards (following Stephen's death, the persecution of the Jerusalem church and the dispersion of the church), the household becomes the basis of the life of the church and the focus of its mission.

108. Balentine (2000, p. 1077) describes the range of prayers as follows: 'With the dissolution of the monarchy in the exilic and postexilic periods, the cult loses its institutional base and prayer assumes a variety of different forms and expressions that embody the legacies of both personal piety and official religion. This trend continued in early Judaism and through the first centuries of the early Church (c. 250 BCE-200 CE) as statutory and spontaneous prayers were offered in the temple, synagogue and home'.

Twice there is explicit mention of 'a place of prayer', and both times in Philippi. The first is outside the city gate at (or at least close to) the river (Ac 16:13), and the other is while Paul, Silas and the companions are 'on their way' to 'the place of prayer' (v. 16). Other specified prayer settings include the upper room in Jerusalem (Ac 1:13-1:14); the temple (Ac 3:1); Samaria (Ac 8:14-17); the house of Judas (Ac 9:11); the upper room in Joppa where the dying Tabitha (Dorcas) was lying (Ac 9:36-42); the top of a roof in the city Joppa (Ac 10:9); the house of Cornelius (Ac 10:44-46); the house of Mary the mother of John Mark (Ac 12:12); Antioch, Lystra and Iconium (Ac 13:2-3; 14:23); a prison in Philippi (Ac 16:25); Miletus (Ac 20:35); the shores of Tyre (Ac 21:5); on a boat during a storm (Ac 27:29); and on the island of Malta (Ac 28:8).

Prayers are offered in the presence of a range of audiences, including Jewish believers, God-fearers, Jewish leaders, Gentile believers, Gentile unbelievers and political leaders of the Roman Empire.

## □ Theme or type: What is prayed?

In Acts, a range of themes are addressed in prayer, and subsequently, a variety of types of prayers form part of the narrative. Reporting of unspecified prayers, worship, praise and thanksgiving by believers (which likely also included prayers) are scattered throughout Acts (cf. 1:13-14; 2:4; 2:42; 2:46-47; 3:8-9; 6:4; 9:11; 9:18; 10:4; 10:9; 10:30-31; 10:44-46; 11:5; 13:2; possibly 16:13; 16:25; possibly 20:1-3; 21:20; possibly 21:26; 22:17; possibly 28:30-31).

Prayers related to specific themes and contexts include the following:

- appointment and setting apart of leaders (Ac 1:24; 6:6; 13:3; 14:23)
- receipt of the Holy Spirit (Ac 8:14-17; possibly 9:13-17; possibly 26:26-36)
- healing (possibly Ac 3:1; 28:8; possibly 9:32-35; 9:36-42; possibly 16:16; 28:8)
- intercession and petitions to God - also for unbelievers (Ac 4:23-31; 7:59-60; 8:22-24; 10:2; 12:5; 12:12; 26:29)
- farewell scenes (Ac 20:35; 21:5)
- safety in physical danger (Ac 27:29).

## □ Content: Substance of prayer

Most references concerning prayer in Acts are narrative reportings of prayer, rather than recordings of the specific content of prayers. This may suggest that the implied readers of Acts would be familiar with the range of content that was included in prayers (especially from a Jewish perspective) or that testimony to the act of praying was of greater importance than the exact wording or formulae used. Some of the few examples of recorded (or specified) prayers are briefly discussed.

There is only one instance in which a prayer in Acts includes references to Psalms (4:23–31). These are namely Psalms 2:1–2 and 146:6, and they are reappropriated by the believers to address the context at hand. Given the central role of the Psalms in the Jewish worship tradition, this scarcity is surprising. However, this does not imply that actual prayer and worship practices were devoid of Jewish Scriptural references; rather (at the very least), it was not considered necessary to be included in the reporting of prayers by the implied author of Acts.

In Acts 8:22–24, Peter instructs Simon to pray to the Lord specifically for repentance and forgiveness following Simon’s attempt to purchase the ability to heal through the laying on of hands; yet Simon promptly returns the responsibility to do so to Peter, and the implied readers are left unsure whether this then does, indeed, take place.

One instance of the consequence of not worshipping God (most likely including prayer) is reported in Acts, namely the punishment of Herod in Acts 12:23. Such a public death of a central political figure stands in contrast to the thousands who have, up to that point, come to faith and have been filled with the Holy Spirit. The stubbornness and disobedience of religious and political figures is emphasised elsewhere in Acts and sometimes includes intercessory commitments and petitions on their behalf (cf. Ac 26:29).

## ■ Unique perspectives and theological contributions in terms of prayer in Acts

The frequency and type of terminology relating to prayer and worship, and the analysis of these occurrences according to agency, location and timing, theme (type) and content (substance) make it possible to discern what the unique perspectives and theological contributions to a Biblical Theology of prayer might be, based on the book of Acts.

In this final part of the chapter, I propose four markers for further reflection, namely, (1) prayer as foundation of the early church, (2) prayer in relation to community, (3) prayer informed by context and (4) prayer as a force of life.

### ■ Prayer as foundation of the early church

Reading the book of Acts, it is evident that prayer was a core expression of faith in the early church. Although it gradually evolved to become a practice for both Jewish and Gentile believers, its Jewish roots and the long history of prayer in the Jewish tradition should be acknowledged. In Acts, the ascension of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit becomes the means by which any believer, at any given time, can pray to God, can

call on Jesus Christ as Lord and can prayerfully act in the name of the Comforter. The act of praying is presented in Acts as a 'given' in the lives of the faith communities, and it is included in the day-to-day activities of these communities as a characteristic (almost matter-of-factly), yet it is also reported at numerous key moments in the narrative of Acts. It is simultaneously the proverbial heartbeat of a life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which believers seemingly did not even have to debate about. It is also a very particular and important means of connecting with the Creator God and with Jesus Christ, the Lord of all – personally as well as collectively. Within the missional context of Acts, where the command to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth stands central, it is noteworthy that commands to leaders, setting apart of leaders and their sending off are very often accompanied by prayer.

## ■ Prayer in relation to community

In the book of Acts, prayer is depicted as having both a communal and an individual character; its agents range from individuals mentioned by name to groups of believers and larger communities of faith. Praying is not limited to certain offices, titles or leadership roles; it is practised by all believers. Although it is often narrated in relation to particular key figures in the narrative of Acts, one may deduce that all believers participated in prayer in less formal worship settings (e.g. house churches), as well as in more private settings such as homes.

Prayer appears to be a means to practice one's commitment not only to God but also to the community of believers (e.g. by means of intercession, laying on of hands for appointing leaders, healing and petitions on behalf of others). The act of praying thus has a vertical dimension, namely to exalt, praise and worship God, as well as a horizontal dimension to act as a representative of God, of a larger faith community and as a testimony to the relationship between God and believers.

## ■ Prayer informed by context

The range of agents, settings and themes of the prayers of the book of Acts testifies to the contextual nature of prayer and praying. Acts resists any form of formulistic approach to prayer. In fact, the scarcity of recordings of prayers places even more emphasis on the diversity and even open-endedness of prayer. That believers pray is more important than what exactly is prayed.

Prayer is not confined to traditional religious settings and is hardly ever depicted in the same manner twice. Moreover, intercessory prayers and petitions on behalf of others are not limited to believers but also, at times,

include unbelievers. As such, prayer is attuned to the real-life situations in which people find themselves (also of suffering) and is adaptable to address those situations from a faith perspective in relation to the Triune God.

## ■ Prayer as a force of life

Prayer is depicted as a creative, powerful force of life and as an instrument of change in the book of Acts – one which does not stand separate from the power of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection testimony of Jesus Christ or the work of God, but which channels life through believers in a particular manner. Prayer is not a magic trick that can be evoked to impress; its power cannot be bought or earned. It is a gift of grace which forms part of the new life for believers, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is not a means of maintenance – to keep the status quo intact – but rather brings about change and healing on numerous levels. Prayer as a force of life is expressed in more than words and beyond private, internalised (emotional) experiences. In Acts, it is often accompanied by physical, bodily acts, standing in the tradition of Jewish worship and the involvement of the person in their entirety when approaching God.<sup>109</sup>

## ■ Conclusion

In this chapter, I proposed a three-part discussion of prayer and worship in the book of Acts. By identifying occurrences of three semantic domains relating to prayer and praying in the first part, it became clear that references to prayer and praying are prevalent throughout the narrative – whether explicit or implicit. In the second part, the ordering of these occurrences highlighted the range of references to prayer and praying: whether in terms of who prays, where and when praying takes place, the themes and types of prayers reported or the (scarce) recording of content of prayers presented to the audience. The third part was an attempt to draw these observations together in a coherent manner by focusing on the unique perspectives and theological contribution of these occurrences to the broader theme of a Biblical Theology of prayer. Here, four markers serve as pointers toward further reflection, especially for shaping Christian faith communities in contemporary settings – including academia.

If prayer was the foundation of the early church, practised on multiple levels in relation to community, was strongly informed by context and was a force of life for the founders of the Christian movement, then what may

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109. Balentine (2000, p. 1077) describes prayer as communication with God, which includes both word and deed: 'In short, prayer is both a linguistic and a gestural construal of the fundamental realities that define relationship with God'.



we today re-learn, re-imagine and re-claim to be consistent with our roots? Have we not perhaps made too little of prayer in some parts of the church family and become too dependent on the familiarity and predictability of particular prayer settings? Have we perhaps made too much of the attraction of prayer in other parts of the church family, highlighting the miracle elements of healings and drastic change, yet ignoring the miracles of everyday life and the faithful prayers of millions of believers through the centuries? Do we take seriously the role of prayer in discerning and setting apart leaders, of praying persistently together, of interceding and petitioning for one another as a family of believers – but also for our enemies? Do we embrace the creativity of prayer in our everyday lives and in our expressions of faith, or do we confine ourselves to what we think prayer ‘ought’ to be? Perhaps it is precisely the narrative of the Book of Acts that can renew our understanding and our practices of prayer, toward the fullness of life promised by God Triune, through a relationship with Jesus Christ and ignited by the power of the Holy Spirit.

# Thanksgiving in the Pauline Epistles

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## ■ Introduction

The theme of thanksgiving in the Pauline Corpus largely overlaps with the theme of prayer. With the exception of one instance in which Paul thanks his co-workers for their ministerial work on behalf of the Gentile churches (Rm 16:4), all instances of thanksgiving are directed to God (cf. Pao 2002, p. 20, 2012, p. 50). In fact, Witherington (2006a, p. 188) and Boring (2015, p. 59) point out that in New Testament (NT) times, people in the Mediterranean world generally thanked God or the gods for what someone has done and thus communicated vertically instead of horizontally. It has been argued that the primary function of Paul's thanksgiving sections is to rhetorically invoke trust and a good attitude from his readers (Cornelius 1993, p. 82; Neyrey 2009, p. 23). While the rhetorical function of these thanksgiving sections certainly has to be kept in mind, there are certain features in them that deserve further investigation. In fact, Schreiner (1990, p. 29) argued that 'Paul's thanksgivings and intercessory prayers often signal the major themes in the letter, and thus demand careful analysis'.

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The identification of the concept of thanksgiving in the Pauline Letters is approached by identifying the most important lexemes that convey the notion of thanksgiving as listed in Louw and Nida (1989, pp. 300–301, 428–429) under the semantic domains of ‘thankful, grateful’ (domains 25.99–25.101) and ‘thanks’ (domains 33.349–353). The lexemes that are used in this meaning are discussed in the following sections.

### ■ εὐχαριστέω

This lexeme is used in the meaning of ‘to be thankful on the basis of some received benefit – “to be thankful, to be grateful”’ (domain 25.100 in Louw & Nida 1989, p. 300) and ‘to express gratitude for benefits or blessings – “to thank, thanksgiving, thankfulness”’ (domain 33.349, in Louw & Nida 1989, pp. 428–429; cf. Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 415–416).

Instances in which this lexeme is used in Paul are: Romans 1:8, 21; 7:25; 14:6; 16:4; 1 Corinthians 1:4, 14; 10:30; 11:24; 14:17, 18; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 1:16; 5:20; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3, 12; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13; 5:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13; and Philemon 4.

### ■ εὐχαριστία

The lexeme is used ‘to express gratitude for benefits or blessings – “to thank, thanksgiving, thankfulness”’ (domain 33.349) in Louw and Nida (1989, pp. 300, 428–429; cf. Bauer et al. 2000, p. 416).

Instances in which this lexeme is used in Paul are: 1 Corinthians 14:16; 2 Corinthians 4:15; 9:11, 12; Ephesians 5:4; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 2:7; 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:1; 4:3, 4.

### ■ χάρις

Although this lexeme is used with various meanings, the focus here is on instances where it is used as ‘an expression of thankfulness – “thanks”’ (domain 33.350 in Louw & Nida 1989, p. 429; cf. Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 1080–1081).

Instances in which this lexeme is used in Paul are: 2 Timothy 1:3, 12; Philemon 7; Romans 6:17; 7:25; 1 Corinthians 10:30; 15:57; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 8:16; 9:15; Colossians 3:16.

### ■ εὐχάριστος

This lexeme is used as ‘pertaining to being thankful for what has been done to or for someone – “thankful”’ (domain 25.99 in Louw & Nida 1989, p. 300)

and as ‘pertaining to expressing thanks – “thankful, thanking, grateful”’ (domain 33.352 in Louw & Nida 1989, p. 429; cf. Bauer et al. 2000, p. 416).

Colossians 3:15 is the only instance in which it is used by Paul.

## ■ ἀχάριστος

This lexeme is used as ‘pertaining to a complete lack of thankfulness – “unthankful, ungrateful”’ (domain 25.101 in Louw & Nida 1989, p. 301; cf. Bauer et al. 2000, p. 159).<sup>110</sup>

2 Timothy 3:2 is the only instance in which it is used by Paul.

Ledogar (1968, p. 92), in his study of the meaning of the word εὐχαριστέω in the first-century CE, concluded that ‘it signifies always *the outward expression in word or deed of the interior sentiment of gratitude for a favor received*’ [emphasis original]. This meaning is also endorsed by Hoehner (2002, p. 251). If the contexts in which Paul uses the above-mentioned lexemes in these meanings are assessed by way of a preliminary reading, the concept of thanksgiving can be categorised under the following headings: (1) Paul thanking God for the congregation or individual persons, (2) Paul thanking God for other things, (3) Paul thanking people and (4) thanking God as something that God’s people ought to do. Consequently, the discussion on thanksgiving in the Pauline Corpus will be conducted under these main headings. The main question that will be asked in this research is what the theological significance of thanksgiving is in the Pauline Corpus, especially how thanksgiving fits into a Biblical Theology of prayer.

## ■ Paul thanking God for the congregation or individual persons

Under the main rubric of Paul thanking God for the congregation or individual persons, his thanksgiving can be subdivided into thanksgiving (1) for believers’ faith and love, (2) for the grace, victory or salvation in Christ and (3) for something that God is trusted to accomplish in believers’ lives.

### ■ Paul thanking God for believers’ faith and love

To thank God for believers’ faith and love (Rm 1:8; Col 1:3–4; 1 Th 1:2; 2 Th 1:3; Phlm 4, 7; 2 Tm 1:3) is a recurring theme that accompanies many of Paul’s Letters and normally occurs at the beginning of a letter. Romans 1:8 is the

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110. The terms ἐξομολόγῃμαι and ἄνθομολόγῃμαι can also be used in the sense of giving thanks (Mt 11:25; Lk 2:38, domain 33.51 in Louw & Nida 1989, p. 429), but are not used in such a sense in the Pauline Corpus.

only instance in which Paul gives thanks ‘through Jesus Christ’ [διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ], which conveys the notion that Christ ‘created the access to God for such thanks to be offered’ (Moo 2018, p. 60; cf. Schreiner 2018b, p. 54). He gives thanks for the faith of the Roman congregation that is proclaimed ‘in the whole world’ [ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ]. In the next two verses (vv. 10–11), Paul links this thanksgiving with the notion that he always<sup>111</sup> thinks of the Roman congregation in his prayers, asking God that he will succeed in coming to him. In this instance, thanksgiving is thus linked with prayer in general.

In Colossians 1:3–4, thanksgiving for the congregation’s faith in Christ<sup>112</sup> and love is also linked with praying. According to Verse 6, Paul’s<sup>113</sup> thanksgiving is also associated with the grace of God, which implies that the faith of the congregation for which Paul thanks God also has to be understood within the sphere of God’s grace. According to Pao (2012, p. 50), Paul’s thanksgiving is ‘in line with the OT [Old Testament] heritage’, being ‘an act of praise and confession when the mighty acts of God among his people are remembered (cf. Ps 35:19; 10:4; 109:30)’.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3, Paul once again links his thanksgiving for the congregation’s faith and love with mentioning them in his prayers, but he specifically mentions that when he thanks God he is ‘remembering’ (μνημονεύοντες, v. 3) them before God, which ‘unpacks’ the verb εὐχαριστοῦμεν (Arnold 2012, p. 59). Another important factor that has to be noticed in this passage is that Paul’s intercessory prayer is primarily based on thanksgiving and not on petitioning (Weima 2014, p. 114). According to 2 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul’s<sup>114</sup> thanks to God for the congregation’s growing faith and love is presented as something that Paul feels obliged to do [ὀφείλω] and something that is fitting or right [ἄξιος]. Weima (2014, p. 526) argues that Paul’s choice of words points to the need felt by Paul to give thanks to God as being responsible for the faith and love in the Thessalonians’ lives. Similarly, according to Schogren (2012, p. 244), Paul regards the congregation’s faith and love as ‘evidence that God is working in Thessalonica’. The theocentric nature that underpins Paul’s thanksgiving is thus clearly visible here, which is similar in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 (Weima 2014, p. 526).

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111. The notion that Paul ‘always’ [πάντοτε] mentions the congregation in his prayers does not point to ‘unceasing petition’ but to ‘prayer offered at frequent intervals’ (O’Brien 1977, p. 214; cf. McKnight 2018, p. 65).

112. Although the genitive ‘faith in Christ’ [πίστιν [. . .] ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ] can also be understood as their faithfulness in the sphere of Christ, the close parallels in Ephesians 1:15 and Philemon 4–5 point to Christ being the object of faith and trust (McKnight 2018, p. 92).

113. Although ‘The Letter to the Colossians’ authorship is disputed, notable recent commentators defend Colossians’ authenticity (e.g. Beale 2019; Carson & Moo 2005; Köstenberger, Kellum & Quarles 2016; McKnight 2018; Moo 2008; Pao 2012; Wright & Bird 2019).

114. Notable recent commentators who defend the letter’s authenticity include Carson and Moo (2005); Fee (2009); Schogren (2012); Weima (2014); Köstenberger et al. (2016); and Wright and Bird (2019).

In Paul's letter to Philemon (vv. 4–5), he mentions that he always<sup>115</sup> thanks God for hearing of Philemon's faith and love that he has towards Jesus and all the saints, which is Paul's combined remembrance of Philemon in his prayers,<sup>116</sup> as well as a prayer that the sharing or fellowship [κοινωνία] of his faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in believers, for Christ's sake (v. 6). In other words, Paul prays that Philemon's faith and love, which he mutually shares with other believers in Christ, may lead to a deeper understanding of every good thing that believers share for the sake of Christ (McKnight 2017, p. 69; cf. Moo 2008, p. 393).<sup>117</sup>

When Timothy is addressed in 2 Timothy 1:3, Paul<sup>118</sup> writes that he thanks God, whom he serves, as did his forefathers, as he constantly<sup>119</sup> remembers Timothy in his prayers, night and day. In Verse 5, Paul specifically mentions that he is reminded of Timothy's sincere faith that first dwelled in Timothy's grandmother, Eunice and now dwells in Timothy. The identification of thanksgiving with prayer and remembrance is once again clear here. Hereby, Paul shows how faith has 'passed on through deep interpersonal relationships and ministry partnerships' (Köstenberger 2017, p. 213). According to Towner (2006, p. 449), 'Paul connects his ministry to the worship of Israel by placing himself into the line leading back to his "forebears"' (cf. Witherington 2006b, p. 310).

## ■ Paul thanking God for the grace, victory, or salvation in Christ

While Paul's thanksgiving to God for the grace or salvation in Christ might occur in the opening sections of his letters, this is not necessarily the case

115. As with Romans 1:8, 'always' [πάντοτε] does not point to an unceasing petition (see aforementioned).

116. This notion again evokes the rich heritage of remembrance in the Hebrew Bible (see e.g. 1 Sm 1:11, 19; McKnight 2017, p. 64).

117. The meaning of Verse 6 is difficult to determine, to the point that scholars generally view this verse as the most challenging verse in Philemon to translate (Longenecker 2016, p. 171). The dative *ἐν ἐπιγνώσει* could be translated instrumentally ('by the knowledge'; e.g. KJV, NKJV) or as a dative of sphere ('in the knowledge'; e.g. ASV, NIV). The dative of sphere is the preferred choice here, which contextually implies that a full understanding is the goal of Philemon's sharing of his faith and love. The translation 'for the full knowledge' (ESV) thus conveys this notion.

118. The authorship of the Pastoral Letters is disputed. However, some notable recent interpreters defend its authenticity (e.g. Carson & Moo 2005; Johnson 2001; Köstenberger 2017; Köstenberger et al. 2016; Porter 2016; Schnabel 2012; Towner 2006; Yarbrough 2018). Suppose everything in the Pastoral Letters cannot be attributed to Paul directly. In that case, it is also possible that fragments of Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus were collected by someone such as Luke, who might have compiled and edited them into what we have today (Wright & Bird 2019, p. 1111).

119. Paul's use of 'constantly' [ἀδιάλειπτος] and 'night and day' are used hyperbolically (Köstenberger 2017, p. 211).

(Rm 6:17; 7:25; 1 Cor 1:4; 15:57; 2 Cor 2:14; 8:16; 9:15; Php 1:3; Col 1:12; 1 Th 2:13; 2 Th 2:13). In Romans 6:17–18, Paul offers ‘thanks to God’ [χάρις τῷ θεῷ]<sup>120</sup> for the congregation who once were slaves of sin, but now have become obedient from the heart and have become slaves of righteousness. Here Paul’s thanksgiving forms part of his discourse on the new life in Christ in contrast with the life under the rule of sin and the law. The obedience of the heart here points to their conversion and their coming to faith in Christ (Moo 2018, p. 426). Schreiner (2018, p. 333) argues that one must not pass over Paul’s thanksgiving lightly here. It must be observed that ‘God is the one who rescued them from sin’s dominion’ and that it is ‘due to his work that they have become obedient’ (Schreiner 2018, p. 333; [*emphasis in original*]). Paul’s thanksgiving here thus emphasises his theocentric theology and the fact that people’s obedience to the gospel is rooted in ‘the indicative of God’s work’.

At the end of Paul’s discourse on the law, in Romans 7:24–25, he asks who will deliver him from ‘this body of death’ [τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου], and then writes ‘Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord’ [χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν]. Whether the thanks that Paul expresses here is to be understood as ‘an eschatological note of thanksgiving’ (Pao 2002, p. 133) that looks forward to future deliverance or to the deliverance that has already come in Christ (e.g. Jewett 2006, p. 473; Moo 2018) is dependent on whether Romans 7:7–24 points to a Christian or a pre-Christian experience. While there are good arguments on both sides of the spectrum, there are pertinent indicators in the text that favours the reading of a pre-Christian experience.<sup>121</sup> ‘This body of death’ (v. 24) points to the ‘reigning power of sin’ under the law (Moo 2018, p. 489). Romans 7:7–24 can thus be understood as a description of the wretched position of someone under the law in which one wants to do what the law requires but lacks the ability to carry it out (Rm 7:13–23). The thanks that Paul expresses here is thus an acknowledgement of Christ’s work of deliverance by his death and resurrection in which his people are delivered from the law and the power of sin (cf. Jewett 2006, p. 473; Moo 2018, p. 489; Wright 2002, pp. 571–572). Yet, even is this understanding, the new, delivered position of believers that they experience ‘now’ (Rm 8:1) can be seen as an eschatological

120. Jewett (2006, p. 418) notes that χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ [but thanks {be} to God] is an elliptical form of χάρις ἔστω τῷ θεῷ [thanks be to God], which is found in ancient Greek writings (e.g. Epictetus, *Diatribai* 4.4.7). This elliptical form is also used in 2 Corinthians 2:14 and 9:15, which points to ‘a conventional expression of gratitude for divine benefaction’.

121. For example, the connection of the ‘I’ with the ‘flesh’ (vv. 14, 18, 25), which points to the eschatologically old existence under the law (see Rm 7:5–6); statements like ‘I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin’ (v. 14), which stand in contrast with Romans 6:2, 6, 11, 18–22, in which the release from the power of sin is described (cf. Rm 8:9, which states that believers are ‘not in the flesh’); the thrust of Romans 7:14–25, which describes a defeat by sin, not a struggle with sin (see Du Toit 2019, pp. 192–194 for further arguments).

reality that does not merely look forward but that has already broken into the present, awaiting future completion (cf. Moo 2018, p. 495).

In 1 Corinthians 1:4–8, which forms part of the opening section of the letter, Paul writes that he always gives thanks to God for the grace of God that was given to the congregation in Christ Jesus, being enriched in him in all speech and knowledge and not lacking in any gift, while they wait for the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain them to the end. In Verse 9, he states that God is faithful, by whom believers were called into the fellowship of his Son. It is notable that Paul still gives thanks to God for the congregation and acknowledges God's work in them in spite of the many problems in the congregation (cf. Ciampa & Rosner 2010, p. 141; Fee 2014, p. 35). The 'grace' (χάρις, v. 4) which Paul thanks God for is often closely associated with the 'gift/gifts' (χάρισμα/χαρίσματα, v. 7) that God gives, pointing to 'concrete expressions of God's gracious activity' (Fee 2014, p. 35). According to Schreiner (2018a, p. 54), God's 'grace' also points to his 'transforming power'. On the basis of O'Brien's (1977, pp. 261–263) discussion of the manifold function of introductory thanksgivings, Ciampa and Rosner (2010, p. 141) argue that Paul's thanksgivings serve four purposes, which are especially clear in this passage. The first is that it has a didactic function, serving to remind the congregation of Paul's teachings, focusing on the 'divine source of their spiritual endowments'. Secondly, a paraenetic function can be detected in references to awaiting Christ's return and the need to be ready, although this function is more prominent in thanksgivings that include intercessory prayer. Thirdly, the thanksgiving sections serve a pastoral purpose in that Paul communicates 'Paul's genuine care and concern for the church'. The thanksgiving section finally serves an epistolary function in 'introducing the main themes of the letter'.

In 1 Corinthians 15:57, there is another instance of the elliptical expression τῷ θεῷ χάρις [thanks {be} to God] (see Rm 6:17) in which thanks is rendered to God for giving the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ. In this instance, Paul's thanksgiving forms part of a doxology, which forms the climax of his entire argument of Christ's victory through resurrection (Fee 2014, p. 892). The 'giving' [διδόντι] of the victory in Christ is in the present tense, which provides the basis for thanksgiving (Thiselton 2000, p. 1304). Thanksgiving is thus not merely rendered for something that God did in the past but also for that which God is continuously doing. Yet, the present tense of δίδόντι does not have to be confined to the actual present, but, as Pao (2012, p. 291) rightly observes, the victory of Christ also looks forward to the eschaton, especially if the rest of this chapter is considered (see esp. vv. 51–53). Thanksgiving thus also underlies trusting God for the future.

Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 2:14, 8:16 and 9:15, Paul uses the elliptical expression τῷ θεῷ χάρις or χάρις τῷ θεῷ. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul renders his thanks to God, who leads believers as captives (Harris 2005, p. 245)



in Christ's triumphal procession. The language referring to the triumphal procession [θριαμβεύω] is probably borrowed from the Greco-Roman world (Collins 2013, p. 70). Paul here counters the apparent lack of thanksgiving among the Corinthians, who had an obsession with power and failed to receive their many benefits as God's gifts (Seifrid 2014, pp. 82–83). In 2 Corinthians 8:16, Paul gives his thanks to God, who put the same earnest care in Titus' heart that Paul has for the congregation. One can note here that the word χάρις that is used in these instances can also be used for 'grace' and 'giving', which implies that Titus' attitude 'was an act of grace' on the basis of 'God's initiation' (Guthrie 2015, p. 420) and implies 'the joy and pleasure of a relationship of receiving and giving' (Seifrid 2014, p. 341). In 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul renders thanks to God for his indescribable gift. Paul's thanksgiving here forms part of a doxology. In using the word χάρις here, thanksgiving can be understood as the mere reception of God's grace (Seifrid 2014, p. 367). As for God's gift itself, according to Seifrid (2014, p. 367), it involves 'God's self-giving in Christ, the wonder of his taking upon himself our poverty, sin, and guilt: the wonder in which he has made us rich'. For Barclay (2015, p. 1), God's gift refers to the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Some commentators see the Son himself as God's gift (see Guthrie 2015, p. 461).

In Philippians 1:3–6, there is again a strong connection between Paul's remembering of the congregation in his prayers and his thanksgiving. He thanks God for their partnership in the gospel and adds that he is sure that God, who began a good work in them, will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ. Halloway (2017, pp. 71–72) notes that Paul's expression 'I thank my God' [εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου] could be related to expressions found in letters at the time and the Judaeoan liturgical context. Keown (2017a, p. 118) draws attention to the fact that many of the themes that are addressed later in the letter – such as joy, partnership, the gospel, love, right thinking and blamelessness – feature in this thanksgiving section. This fact confirms that the thanksgiving section in Paul's Letters is often thematic for the rest of the letter. When Paul mentions God's completion of the good work of salvation<sup>122</sup> in them (v. 6), he combines a statement of thanksgiving with a statement of assurance, which he also does elsewhere (1 Cor 1:8–9; 1 Th 1:4; Keown 2017a, pp. 133–134). Here, thanksgiving thus also implies an assurance of God's continuing faithfulness.

In Colossians 1:12, Paul also combines his thanks for the congregation with a prayer for the congregation to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk worthy of the Lord to

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122. Some commentators link the good work to God's good work of the Philippians' partnership in the gospel (e.g. Hansen 2009, p. 50).

please him, bear fruit and increase in the knowledge of God. He prays that they are strengthened with all power to endure and be patient with joy (Col 1:9-11). Paul specifically thanks God for qualifying the congregation to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light, who has delivered them from the domain of darkness and transferred believers to the kingdom of God's Son, in whom they have redemption and the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:12-14). Thus, Paul's thanksgiving here is embedded within the acknowledgement of the transformational power of the gospel and the fact that all nations now share in the inheritance in Christ through the gospel. According to Pao (2012, p. 73), the combination of thanksgiving and prayer for a life that pleases God confirms that thanksgiving can be understood as an act to praise and worship God and confess him as Lord. The call to give thanks to God is thus 'another means through which one can "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord"', which implies that thanksgiving with a believer is a particular manifestation of a holy life that pleases God (cf. Beale 2019, p. 62). Pao (2012, p. 74) also notes that thanksgiving is closely connected to being strengthened with all power (v. 11), which establishes the idea that thanksgiving is a natural result of God's power working in believers. McKnight (2018, p. 119) argues that the *qualifier* μετὰ χαρᾶς [with joy] in Verse 11 can also be taken with thanksgiving [εὐχαριστέω] in Verse 12, which he renders as 'giving joyful thanks' (cf. Beale 2019, p. 62). McKnight (2018, p. 119) also notes that the concept of χαρά [joy] is linguistically and theologically related to χάρις [grace], a word which Paul also uses to convey thanks elsewhere (cf. Pao 2002, p. 81). But it could be added that the word εὐχαριστέω, which Paul uses here, and the noun εὐχαριστία, which Paul uses elsewhere, are also linguistically and theologically related to both χάρις and χαρά. One could thus argue that grace, joy and thanksgiving are interrelated and even interdependent theological concepts. In the same vein, Moo (2008, p. 100) writes that '[t]hanksgiving is therefore the flip side of a key Pauline theological claim: that Christians are saved by and live in grace'.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, after mentioning that the congregants were exhorted, encouraged and charged by Paul and his co-workers to walk in a manner worthy of God (1 Th 2:12), Paul adds (using καί) that he and his co-workers thank God constantly that the congregation received the word of God through their preaching, and that they accepted it not as a word from people but from God. Paul states that this word is 'at work in you believers' [ἐνεργεῖται ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν]. God's work in believers, acceptance of God's word and thanksgiving are connected here.

## ■ Paul thanking God for something that God is trusted to accomplish in believers' lives

Only rarely is Paul's thanksgiving combined with a prayer of petition in which Paul asks God to accomplish something in believers' lives (Eph 1:16; 1 Th 3:9).

In Ephesians 1:15–20, Paul<sup>123</sup> again thanks God for the faith and love in the congregation's lives while remembering them in his prayers, but combines this thanksgiving with praying that God may give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. He also prays for the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened to know the hope to which they have been called. But Paul adds that they may know 'what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints' (v. 18) and 'what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power that he worked in Christ' (vv. 19–20). In other words, in Paul's petition, God's power and grace that work in believers and enable them to faithfully respond is acknowledged here (Arnold 2012, p. 103).

In 1 Thessalonians 3:6–10, Paul starts off by acknowledging the congregation's faith and love, and the fact that he and his co-workers are encouraged by it. Paul then proceeds to rhetorically ask what thanksgiving [εὐχαριστία] he and his co-workers can return or repay [ἀνταποδίδομι] to God for the congregation for all the joy [χαρά] with which Paul and his co-workers rejoice [χαίρω] before God for their sake, as they pray most earnestly, night and day, that they may see the congregation face-to-face and supply what is lacking in their faith.<sup>124</sup> The word ἀνταποδίδομι signifies the principle of reciprocity, which was part of Greco-Roman culture. According to this principle, thanksgiving was understood to a debt that was owed to one's benefactor (Green 2002, p. 172). Yet, according to Shogren (2012, p. 141), Paul's rhetorical question 'comes across as more powerful than his declarations of gratitude'. As Weima (2014, p. 274) concurs: '[w]ords cannot adequately express the deep thanksgiving that Paul feels toward God'. With Paul's use of the cognates εὐχαριστία, χαρά and χαίρω, he uses alliteration that is reminiscent of the Hebrew Bible that uses cognate words to accentuate profound truths (Shogren 2012, p. 141), which again confirms the close relationship between the concepts of thanksgiving, joy and rejoicing.

## ■ Paul thanking God for other things

As can be observed from the previous discussion, Paul's prayer of thanksgiving mostly has believers as objects of thanksgiving, but there are instances of thanking God for something else (1 Cor 1:14; 14:18).

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123. Recent commentators that defend the letter's authenticity while not ruling out the influence of a secretary include O'Brien (1999); Hoehner (2002); Carson and Moo (2005); Arnold (2010); Thielman (2010); Baugh (2016); Köstenberger et al. (2016); Bock (2019) and Wright and Bird (2019).

124. Shogren (2012, p. 142) notes that Paul does not distinguish between faith and doctrine, which are probably blended together here.

In 1 Corinthians 1:14, Paul writes ‘I thank God’ [εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ] for not baptising anyone except two persons in the congregation, which forms part of his appeal for unity in the church. Similarly, Paul’s thanks to God (using the same expression) for speaking in tongues more than any in the congregation in 1 Corinthians 14:18 forms part of his appeal to the congregation to speak in tongues orderly. In both of these instances, Paul’s thanksgiving serves more of a rhetorical purpose to strengthen his appeal. As Fee (2014, p. 748) points out, his thanking can be understood as a kind of ‘mild oath, a way of calling God to be witness to the absolute truthfulness of what follows’, similar to the expression ‘I tell the truth, I am not lying’ elsewhere (Rm 9:1; Gl 1:20; 1 Tm 2:7). In the case of 1 Corinthians 1:14, Paul’s main point is that baptism is not his primary focus in his ministry, whereas in 1 Corinthians 14:18 his intention is not to boast about his own speaking in tongues, but ‘to assure the Corinthians that Paul values the gift of tongues’ (Schreiner 2018a, p. 289).

## ■ Paul thanking people

Only one instance of Paul thanking people is recorded in his letters. In Romans 16:4, Paul and all the Gentile churches ‘give thanks’ for or to Prisca and Aquila in Christ for risking their lives for Paul. Pao (2012, p. 20) notes, however, that Paul’s inclusion of the Gentile churches as those who give thanks ‘shows that the wider concern for the ministry of God and thus the work of God is in sight’.<sup>125</sup>

## ■ Thanking as something that God’s people ought to do

Whereas in almost all of these instances Paul actively conveys thanks to God, he also mentions the virtue of thanksgiving or instances of thanksgiving as something that God’s people ought to do. This is not necessarily confined to a Christian virtue as such, but something that is expected of all people. Four sub-headings can be identified here: (1) thanksgiving for God’s works, gifts or grace (Rm 1:21; 14:6; 1 Cor 10:30; 2 Cor 1:11; Col 2:7; 1 Th 5:18; 2 Th 2:13–14; 2 Cor 4:15; 9:11–12; Eph 5:4; 1 Tm 4:3–4; 2 Tm 3:2); (2) giving thanks at communion (1 Cor 11:24); (3) giving thanks as part of worship and speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:16, 17; Eph 5:20; Col 3:15–17); and (4) giving thanks together with prayer and supplication (Phlp 4:6; Col 4:2; 1 Tm 2:1).

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125. Jewett (2006, p. 958) observes that the oddness of gentile churches thanking Prisca and Aquila might be best explained by how some financial sacrifices for which these churches were thankful might figure in the background here.

## ■ Thanking God for his works, gifts or grace

In Romans 1:21, the virtue of thanking God is presented as something that is expected of all people. Paul argues that although people knew [γινώσκω] God, they did not honour [δοξάζω] him or give thanks [εὐχαριστέω] to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although knowing God is normally understood in the context of a personal relationship, it must be understood in a limited sense here in that it falls short of knowing God personally (Moo 2018, pp. 117–118; Schreiner 2018b, pp. 92–93). Thanking God is closely related to honouring him and acknowledging him as Creator and God. In other words, the hearts of the people that Paul describes here were idolatrous (cf. Schreiner 2018b, p. 95). As used here, thanksgiving forms part of ‘the fundamental role of the creature’ (Schreiner 2018b, p. 95), or as Thielman (2018, p. 105) argues, the ‘proper response to the good gifts God had provided everyone through his creation, moreover, was thanksgiving’ (cf. Middendorf 2013, p. 130). In other words, it is expected of all human beings, as part of God’s creation, to honour and thank God, otherwise they ‘lose glory themselves and thus are cut off from life and become corruptible’ (Schreiner 2018b, p. 95). Paul thus presents ungratefulness as one of the main characteristics of an idolatrous person (cf. Pao 2002, pp. 91–98).

In Romans 14:6, Paul mentions giving thanks to God for eating or abstaining from food as part of his appeal to consider weaker believers. He argues that both those who eat certain food and those who abstain from certain foods thank [εὐχαριστέω] God for it in order to honour him. As Moo (2018, p. 860) points out, this is one of the earliest references to Christians who observe the practice of offering thanks at a meal, which is borrowed from earlier times (see esp. Dt 8:10; cf. Mk 8:6; cf. also Thielman 2018, p. 633). For Schreiner (2018b, p. 699), the references to thanking God hark back to the heart of idolatry, which is not to glorify and thank God (Rm 1:21). The point would thus be that eating or drinking must glorify God (cf. 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).

In 1 Corinthians 10:30, after his discussion about eating meat from the marketplace, Paul calls the congregants to an attitude in which food is consumed with thankfulness [χαρίς]. He then rhetorically asks why he is being denounced because of that ‘for which I give thanks’ [οὗ ἐγὼ εὐχαριστῶ]. Fee (2014, p. 537) points out that Paul’s mention of thankfulness refers back to 1 Corinthians 10:26, in which Paul cites Psalm 24:1. In an Israelite home, the benediction at a meal was precisely given based on the fact that ‘the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof’ (Ps 24:1). Paul thus seems to level the field between Gentile and Judaeon attitudes to food as long as they receive the food with thankfulness. As Schreiner (2018a, p. 217) states, thanksgiving here ‘acknowledges God’s lordship and sovereignty, recognizing his kindness in providing for human needs’.

In 2 Corinthians 1:10–11, Paul states that God, who delivered him and his co-workers from the deadly peril, will continue to rescue them. He adds that on him they have set their hope that he will rescue them again (v. 10). In Verse 11, Paul continues that the congregation are helping [συνυπουργούντων] him and his co-workers by prayer so that many will give thanks on Paul and his co-workers' behalf for the blessing granted to them by the prayers of many. The genitive present participle *συνυπουργούντων*, which functions as a genitive absolute, can be translated as 'to join in helping' (Long 2015, p. 23), which implies that the helping by prayer ought to follow God's deliverance and believers' hope in God's rescue. The ESV, for example, translates Verse 11 with 'You must also help us by prayer', but this imperatival translation might be reading too much into the participle (see Seifrid 2014, p. 44). In this context, Seifrid (2014, p. 44) warns against seeing prayer as a means to manipulate God's will. He sees prayer as something that effects God's deliverance and salvation. This helping by prayer has the goal of ending in thanksgiving for the blessing God grants through prayer, which in turn accentuates God's grace and his working in and through believers, although they participate in it through prayer (cf. Guthrie 2015, p. 86; Seifrid 2014, p. 45).

Paul mentions thanksgiving [εὐχαριστία] in Colossians 2:7 as something believers ought to do after receiving Christ, walking in him, being rooted and built up in him and being established in the faith. Pao (2012, p. 158) explains that thanksgiving is 'an act of confession' and 'a need to be involved in a continuous act of worship through which one reaffirms the lordship of Christ'. Foster (2016, p. 248) describes thanksgiving here as being part of a believer's faith and as the praise that is given back to God as the sole response for God planting them in faith. McKnight (2018, p. 221) sees thanksgiving in this instance as indicative of maturity and 'a life of gratitude and joy'. Thanksgiving should thus be a natural outflow of a fulfilled life that is empowered by God's grace.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, which forms part of Paul's final instructions to the congregation, after the instruction to pray without ceasing (1 Th 5:17), he urges them to give thanks in all circumstances, which is the will of God in Christ for believers. Paul's appeal to thanksgiving here can be understood as an appeal to lead 'a life of thankfulness' (Shogren 2012, p. 224) or 'a life of thanksgiving' (Pao 2002, p. 103). Pao (2012, pp. 101–102) draws a parallel between this text and Romans 12:1, in which there is also a reference to God's will. In Romans 12:1, Paul calls believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, which points to the devotion of the entire person. In fact, thanksgiving itself can be considered as 'an act of sacrifice' (Pao 2002, p. 24). The phrase 'in all circumstances' [ἐν παντί] in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 points in the same direction, which stands in contrast to the occasional cultic celebration of Israel. Weima (2014, p. 474) rightly sees thanksgiving here as the natural and obligatory response of believers in contrast with

ingratitude, which is characteristic of pagan depravity (Rm 1:21). Paul's focus here is thus on the theocentric nature of the congregation's worship, gathering not primarily to meet the needs of members, but to praise and thank God (Weima 2014, p. 474; cf. Pao 2002, p. 38). Green (2002, pp. 259–260) distinguishes Paul's appeal to thanksgiving here from the fatalistic Stoic idea to thank the gods for everything that comes their way. Christian thanksgiving rather acknowledges 'a sovereign God who can turn any situation to their good (Rm 8.28) and who can make someone more than triumphant in any adversity or other circumstance (Rm 8.31–39)' (Green 2002, pp. 259–260).

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14, Paul does not directly thank God but writes that believers always 'ought to' [ὀφείλω] give thanks to God for the congregation that are brothers beloved by the Lord, because of the fact that God chose them as first-fruits to be saved through the sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. They have been called to this through the gospel so that they may obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the wording in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 is very similar to 2 Thessalonians 1:3 (Weima 2014, p. 635), the focus in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 seems to be more on the congregations' responsibility of giving thanks together with Paul, whereas 2 Thessalonians 1:3 focuses on Paul and his co-workers' thankfulness. This can be derived especially from Paul's appeal in Verse 14, in which he writes: 'to this he called you through our gospel'. The neuter particle ὃ [this] 'refers backward to a general concept rather than a particular word' (Shogren 2012, p. 303), and thus arguably includes the call to thanksgiving in Verse 13. Yet one can detect an *inclusio* between 2 Thessalonians 1:3 and 2:13 here (Shogren 2012, p. 302). The glory of Christ is an eschatological concept in Paul's Letters (Shogren 2012, p. 304) and can here be understood as the final destination of a grateful, sanctified, believing people. Thankfulness can thus be seen as a natural characteristic of sanctification.

In 2 Corinthians 4:15, increasing thanksgiving to the glory of God is presented as a virtue that results from grace in Christ being extended to people. Seifrid (2014, p. 212) notes that it is not that the thanksgivings 'nullify or empty God's favor and giving', but rather that 'in thanksgiving, God's giving comes to its fulfilment'. In other words, thanksgiving itself can be understood as a natural outflow of God's grace working in and through believers and should 'exist in abundance', which glorifies God (Guthrie 2015, pp. 265–266).

According to 2 Corinthians 9:11–12, Paul writes that the congregation will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which will produce thanksgiving [εὐχαριστία] to God. He states that the ministry of service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is overflowing 'through many thanksgivings' [διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστιῶν] to God. The congregation's enrichment is not (merely) on the level of material prosperity, but involves 'enrichments

of grace' (Martin 2014, p. 473; cf. Seifrid 2014, p. 363). Seifrid (2014, p. 363) insightfully explains that thanksgiving is not a return of thanksgiving to God but 'the mark of the gift that has been received as a gift'. He rather understands thanksgiving here as 'the wondrous discovery of God in his love and care as the one, true Giver'. Seifrid further points out that Paul uses the word 'though' [διὰ] here to indicate that 'it is God's gift itself that works thanksgiving *through* them' (Seifrid 2014, p. 363; [*emphasis in original*]); cf. Guthrie 2015, p. 458).

In Ephesians 5:3–4, thankfulness [εὐχαριστία] is mentioned as a Christian virtue that should counter fornication, impurity, greediness, filthiness, foolish talk or crude joking, which are out of place. In these two verses, thanksgiving is the only positive virtue mentioned in contrast with all of these characteristics of an ungodly life. In the next verse (Eph 5:5), Paul calls a sexually immoral, impure and greedy person an idolator [εἰδωλολάτρης]. The idea that an idolatrous person does not thank God is reminiscent of Romans 1:21, in which Paul sees ungratefulness as the main characteristic of an idolatrous person. As all of these negative characteristics speak of selfishness and people's own desires, Hoehner (2002, p. 658) is right to connect thankfulness here with praising God. In line with Pao (2002, pp. 20–21), Arnold (2010, p. 323) describes thanksgiving in this context as 'a fundamental motivating force for aligning one's life around his [God's] purposes and ethical demands'.

In 1 Timothy 4:3–4, thanksgiving is mentioned as something people ought to do for all the food that God created. The thanksgiving to God for food offered is similar here to what we see in Romans 14:6 and 1 Corinthians 10:30. Thanksgiving is thus an expected response to God's gifts and his provision in creation.

According to 2 Timothy 3:2, ungratefulness [ἀχάριστος] is one of the marks of unbelievers in the last days. Yarbrough rightly (2018, p. 406) connects ungratefulness to the lack of thanksgiving of idolatrous people mentioned in Romans 1:21. As can be seen from the list of characteristics of unbelieving people in 2 Timothy 3:2–5, it is clear that these people are selfish at heart, focusing on their own fleshly desires. Ungratefulness epitomises their idolatrous stance (cf. Pao 2002, pp. 162–163).

## ■ Giving thanks at communion

In 1 Corinthians 11:24, Paul refers to Jesus, who gave thanks after breaking the bread on the night that he was betrayed. Although Jesus' thanksgiving for the bread at the last Passover might seem to overlap with the general custom of giving thanks for food (see Rm 14:6; 1 Cor 10:30; 1 Tm 4:3–4), it has more of a covenantal function that commemorates God's deliverance. In OT times, the thanks at Passover conveyed Israel's gratefulness for God, who delivered



them from Egypt. Jesus' thanksgiving at the last Passover became paradigmatic for Christians thanking God at the Lord's Supper for his deliverance in Christ through giving up his own body (cf. Fee 2014, p. 609; Schreiner 2018a, pp. 244-245). In this sense, thanksgiving on the basis of remembrance can be understood as a 'covenantal act' (Pao 2002, p. 60). Thiselton (2000, pp. 870-871) points out that thanking God for the bread does not mean that the food itself is being blessed, but that God who provides food is being blessed. This is generally true for thanking God for all food at all meals, but the main difference between thanking God at a general meal and thanking God for the bread at the Lord's Supper is that the latter thanking specifically involves thanking God for his deliverance in Christ through his body. The bread at the Lord's Supper is thus a symbol for the Bread of Life (God's Son) that was broken on the cross for believers' sins.

## ■ Giving thanks as part of worship and speaking in tongues

In 1 Corinthians 14:16-17, thanksgiving (εὐλογέω, v. 16; εὐχαριστέω, v. 17) is mentioned as a mode of praying in tongues. Fee (2014, pp. 745-747) explains that Paul argues that thanking God in tongues, just like praying (προσεύχομαι, 14:14) in tongues or singing praise (ψάλλω, 14:15) in tongues, is a valid form of thanksgiving, but that it is not desirable in the context of an assembly, for it is unintelligible and should be interpreted in order to be meaningful in such a setup. The underlying relationship between praying, singing praise and thanksgiving is evident here.

According to Ephesians 5:20, believers are called to give thanks [εὐχαριστέω] to God the Father always and for everything as being part of Christian worship and praise in song. According to Hoehner (2002, p. 713), thanksgiving is presented here as the third result of being filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18) after (1) speaking [λαλέω] to one another by means of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and (2) singing [ᾄδω] songs with one's heart to the Lord (Eph 5:19). Thanksgiving, which is presented here in parallel with praising God in speech and singing, can therefore be understood as a natural outflow of the filling with God's Spirit. Arnold (2010, p. 355) describes thanksgiving in this context as 'a defining characteristic of the lives of all believers', which is accentuated by Paul's reference to thanking God 'always for everything' [πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων]. Thanksgiving should thus characterise the lives of his people on every day of the week. It is interesting that Paul also connects submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21) to an attitude of thanksgiving, which exemplifies a humble, grateful disposition under Christ's lordship. It is also noteworthy that 'God the Father' (v. 20) is the object of thanksgiving, which does not only point to the 'closeness and nearness' (Arnold 2010, p. 355) of God but places thanksgiving within the

realm of an intimate, loving relationship between people and God as their caring Father.

In Colossians 3:15–17, the theme of thanksgiving occurs three times: (1) The virtue of being thankful (εὐχάριστος, v. 15) is mentioned in association with the peace of Christ that should reign in people’s hearts. (2) Similar to Ephesians 5:20, in Verse 16, thankfulness or gratitude [χάρις] is mentioned as accompanying teaching and admonishing one another and praising God in song. (3) The sphere of worship and thanks is even widened in Verse 17 in that giving thanks [εὐχαριστέω] to God the Father through Christ is something that Christians are called to do as being part of doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. By using the adjective εὐχάριστος in Verse 15, Paul specifically expresses thanksgiving as an act that ‘acknowledges one’s dependence on God’s grace through Christ’ and thus ‘the lordship of Christ’ (Pao 2012, p. 247). McKnight (2018, p. 328) describes thanksgiving here as ‘a steadfast orientation to God in confidence that God rules supreme through the death, resurrection, and exaltation of the Son’. Gratitude, according to Verse 16, is ‘the proper response required of those who experience God’s grace’ (Pao 2012, p. 250). For Foster (2016, p. 363), believers must sing to God ‘with their whole being’. McKnight (2018, p. 333) argues that the congregants are called here to ‘praise God in a state of gratitude because of the cosmic reconciliation in which they are now participating’. As for the act of giving thanks mentioned in Verse 17, Pao (2012, p. 251) explains that it provides ‘the means through which believers can do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus’ (cf. Moo 2008, p. 292). As the phrase ‘in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ modifies the act of thanksgiving, the meaning is that ‘giving thanks involves everything that believers do’ (Pao 2012, p. 251). Thanksgiving can therefore be described as a mode of living that worships, honours and thanks God in all circumstances. However, Beale (2019, pp. 308–309) draws attention to the fact that even here, thanksgiving can be understood as ‘the expected result’ for letting Christ’s peace reign (v. 15).

## ■ Giving thanks together with prayer and supplication

According to Philippians 4:6, after Paul called the Philippian Christians to always rejoice [χαίρω] in the Lord and let their reasonableness or gentleness [ἐπιεικής] be known to everyone (Phlp 4:4–5), he urges them not to be anxious and call them to make their requests known to God by prayer [προσευχή] and supplication [δέησις] with thanksgiving [εὐχαριστία] in everything. According to Keown (2017b, p. 346), thanksgiving can here be considered as a basic Christian attitude. He writes that it ‘is an essential element of confessing Christ as Lord (Phlp 2:9–11), of heavenly citizenship (Phlp 1:27), of working out one’s salvation (Phlp 2:12), and of pressing on

(Phlp 3:12, 14)'. Similarly, Pao (2002, p. 107) sees thanksgiving here as providing 'the perspective through which petitions can be offered'. As is clear from the context of the letter, gratefulness should characterise Christian living even in difficult circumstances.<sup>126</sup> As O'Brien (1991, p. 494) writes, 'the regular offering of thanks to God is almost synonymous with being a Christian'. It is of significance that thanksgiving is presented here as the basic attitude underlying prayer and supplication. In fact, as Hansen (2009, p. 291) argues, '[w]ithout thanksgiving, prayer becomes merely a way of complaining to God about all the bad things that are or might be happening'. In fact, as Fee (1995, p. 409) writes, '[I]ack of gratitude is the first step to idolatry (Rm 1:21). Thanksgiving is an explicit acknowledgement of creatureliness and dependence, a recognition that everything comes as gift, the verbalisation before God of his goodness and generosity'. One could note in this regard that the prayer of complaint, as is often found in the Psalms (e.g. Ps 3; 5; 13), does not seem to feature in the Pauline Corpus. Instead, believers must make their requests known to God in the attitude of thanksgiving (Phlp 4:5). Rather than complaining, believers should consider suffering for their faith as being part of God's grace (Phlp 1:29).

As part of the final instructions to the congregation, Paul in Colossians 4:2 mentions thanksgiving as something that should complement continuous prayer [*προσευχή*] and being watchful [*γρηγορεύω*]. Pao (2012, p. 291) associates thanksgiving here with 'the need to continue living a life of thanksgiving as believers affirm the lordship of Christ' (cf. McKnight 2018, p. 371). As with Philippians 4:6, thanksgiving can in this instance be considered as an essential element underlying prayer. In light of the call to be watchful, an eschatological element to thanksgiving can also be detected here (cf. 1 Cor 15:57 above), constituting 'a call to respond to God's future act as if it is already an accomplished reality' (Pao 2012, p. 291; cf. Pao 2002, pp. 119–126). Thanksgiving can thus be seen as a necessary consequence of the new, eschatological life in Christ.

Finally, in 1 Timothy 2:1, thanksgivings [*εὐχαριστίας*] are mentioned together with supplications [*δεήσεις*], prayers [*προσευχάς*], and intercessions [*ἐντεύξεις*] that need to be made for all people. A pertinent connection between thanksgiving, petition, and intercession is again present here. Köstenberger (2017, p. 96) argues that when thanksgiving is mentioned with prayer, 'it pertains not merely to the person or item prayed about but is offered in recognition of God's role as the Creator and in anticipation of his awareness to prayers uttered in keeping with his good design' (cf. 1 Tm 4:3–4). Thanksgiving can here be understood as both an attitude underlying supplication and prayer, and as a continuous act that is required of all believers.

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126. One must remember that Paul is writing under difficult circumstances, being in prison (Phlp 1:7). Further, the Philippian church can be considered generally poor, suffering from opposition and persecution. There are also signs that they were internally divided (Keown 2017a, pp. 47–56).

## ■ Conclusion

Although thanksgiving was a reciprocal value in the Greco-Roman world and there are similarities in the way in which the concept of thanksgiving features in the Pauline Corpus, the virtue of thanksgiving has a much deeper theological basis in the Pauline Letters. Paul thanking God for the redemptive work of God in Christ in believers' lives is in fact a standard feature of most of his letters.<sup>127</sup> Many of these introductory thanksgiving sections feature the prevalent themes to be addressed later in the letter (e.g. Phlp 1:3–6), but Paul's thanksgivings are not limited to introductory thanksgivings. As Paul thanks the congregation directly only once (Rm 16:4), his thanksgivings are utterly theocentric, in which Paul directly thanks and acknowledges God for his work in and through believers' lives. The notion of remembrance for God's deeds is thus a prevalent theme in these thanksgiving sections (e.g. Col 1:3–4; 1 Th 1:2–2; Phlp 1:3–6; Phlm 4–5; 2 Tm 1:3). The main things that Paul thanks God for are the congregation's faith and love (e.g. Rm 1:8; Col 1:3–4; 1 Th 1:2), and the grace, victory and salvation that the congregants experience in Christ (e.g. Rm 6:17; 7:25; 1 Cor 1:4; 15:57; 2 Cor 2:14; 8:16; 9:15; Phlp 1:3). Only rarely does Paul use thanksgiving (using the expression εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ) in a purely rhetorical way as part of an appeal (1 Cor 1:14; 14:18). The vast majority of Paul's thanksgivings, therefore, point to the fact that even the fruits of God's Spirit that manifest in believers' lives are considered as the work of God in Christ and thus as grace being bestowed on people's lives. Paul rarely combines thanksgiving with a prayer to God to accomplish something in people's lives (Eph 1:16; 1 Th 3:9), but even then, God's grace is acknowledged in working these things in them.

Thanksgiving at mealtime is mentioned a few times (Rm 14:6; 1 Cor 10:30; 1 Tm 4:3–4) and thanksgiving at the Lord's Supper is mentioned once (1 Cor 11:24) in the Pauline Corpus. Thanking God at meals in the Pauline Corpus does not point to the blessing or even the consecration of food but to honouring God as the giver of all good gifts. A qualitative difference between thanking God at meals and thanking God for the bread at the Lord's Supper has to be pointed out. At the Lord's Supper, thanksgiving is not so much for the bread as it is for God's redemptive offering in breaking the body of the Bread of Life (his Son) at the cross, of which the bread is merely symbolic. Thanking God at the Lord's Supper is thus a covenantal act of remembrance, just as Passover in the OT was a covenantal act of remembrance for God's deliverance from Egypt.

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127. Galatians and Titus are exceptions here. The customary blessing of bestowing grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ on the reader(s) is present in both letters, however (Gl 1:4; Tt 1:3). In the case of Galatians, the absence of a thanksgiving section might be due to Paul's frank tone in the letter and the fact that there are fundamental problems such as the congregation's flirtation with 'another gospel' (Gl 1:6; cf. Moo 2013, pp. 1–2).

In the Pauline Corpus, there exists a close relationship between thanksgiving or gratefulness [εὐχαριστέω, εὐχαριστία, εὐχάριστος, χάρις], grace itself [χάρις], God's spiritual gifts [χαρίσματα], joy [χαρά] and rejoicing [χαίρω], as can be derived not only from the shared stem of these concepts but also from the way in which Paul often uses these concepts together (e.g. 1 Cor 1:4-8; Col 1:9-14; Philp 4:4-6). The effect of this interrelation between concepts is that none of these concepts can exist in isolation in a believer's life. In other words, if one experiences God's grace in Christ or the gifts of the Spirit, it should naturally result in joy, rejoicing and thanksgiving. Conversely, thanksgiving without joy and without living from God's grace would be empty and meaningless.

As the above concepts are related, Paul can also urge believers to be thankful. The imperative to be thankful cannot be divorced from God's grace in Christ. Thankfulness is thus not to be understood as the return of favour to God or as a means to manipulate God to do something, but rather an indispensable attitude that ought to flow from a believer's life (e.g. Rm 14:6; 1 Cor 10:30; 1 Th 5:18). In fact, the lack of thanksgiving or ungratefulness is a prime mark of an idolatrous person, a connection that occurs explicitly in Romans 1:21 and implicitly in Ephesians 3:3-5 and 2 Timothy 3:2 (and arguably elsewhere). Thankfulness can thus be described as an essential Christian attitude and as a way of life, which should follow conversion and fulfilment by God's Spirit. Paul's pertinent connection between thanksgiving and worship is thus expected (1 Cor 14:16-17; Eph 5:20; Col 3:15-17). Worship, in turn, is not confined to singing or occasions of praise but to doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, in which an attitude or disposition of thanksgiving is indispensable (Col 3:17).

The connection between thanksgiving and prayer or petition [προσευχή], supplication [δεήσεις] and intercession [ἐντεύξεις] is apparent in Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2 and 1 Timothy 2:1. Although thanksgiving can be considered as a mode of prayer (e.g. 1 Tm 2:1), it can also be considered as the necessary attitude that underlies all forms of prayer. The attitude of thanksgiving guards against selfish or complaining prayer and ultimately against idolatry. Gratefulness in prayer can be understood as a consequence of eschatological life in Christ, which keeps the focus and the attitude of the believer on the God who freely bestows grace in Christ and empowers Christians to lead a godly and sanctified life that honours and thanks God in everything.

# Worship and adoration in the Pauline Epistles

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## ■ Introduction

In the Pauline Letters<sup>128</sup>, one finds prayers as expressions of gratitude (thanksgivings), requests to God on behalf of others or one's own behalf (intercessions) and prayers of worship and adoration. The focus of this chapter is on *worship and adoration* in the Pauline Letters.

Worship and adoration in prayers are prayers to worship, praise and recognise God for who he is and what he does for humankind. These prayers are declarations, confirmations, confessions and reaffirmations about the character and actions of God. Westermann (1966, pp. 87–89) referred to these as 'declarative praise', nowadays referred to as 'eulogy' or *berakah*.

O'Brien (1999, p. 89) provides a short summary of the development of the eulogy. The earliest form of eulogy was *a single sentence* in response to God's care of humankind (e.g. in Gn 14:20, 'And blessed be God Most

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128. For the purpose of this chapter, all the letters traditionally assigned to Paul are referred to as the 'Pauline Corpus'. Where applicable in the investigation, authorship issues will be attended to.

High, who delivered your enemies into your hand'). O'Brien (1999, p. 89) explains how it *developed* from part of Israel's worship (e.g. 1 Ki 8:15) *into an extended form* to conclude books (e.g. in Ps 41:13), into the benedictions of synagogue prayer, into Qumran literature and into a Christian eulogy found in the New Testament (NT).

In the Pauline Letters, these prayers of worship and adoration vary between confessions, doxologies (hymns of praise to God, including the word δόξα) and eulogies (tributes to God introduced with εὐλογητός). These prayers will be identified in the Pauline Letters and discussed with regard to position in the letters, form and function. A comparison will also be made in order to conclude with a summary of unique perspectives of this corpus in terms of worship and adoration, and to elaborate on the theological contribution of this corpus with regard to prayer as worship and adoration.

## ■ An overview of the occurrence of prayer as *worship* and *adoration* in the Pauline Epistles

Romans 1:25; 9:5; 2 Corinthians 1:3–7; 11:31; and Ephesians 1:3–14 are examples of eulogies ('blessed is God'), while Romans 11:33–36; 16:25–27; Galatians 1:5; Philippians 4:20; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16; and 2 Timothy 4:18 offer doxologies ('glory to God'). Confessions are found in 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15–20; and 1 Timothy 3:16 (see Table 6.1).

## ■ An interpretation of prayer as worship and adoration in the Pauline Letters

The passages identified above will be interpreted within the three categories of eulogies, doxologies and statements of praise to God.

### ■ Eulogies

Eulogies are introduced in the Pauline Letters with εὐλογητός [blessed]. The verb 'to be' is often omitted and one can imagine that this *verb* could either be in the indicative ('blessed is God'), the imperative ('let God be blessed') or the optative ('may God be blessed'). The omission of the verb 'to be' is, however, common in eulogies (see Hoehner 2002, p. 163). O'Brien (1999, p. 94) suggests that Paul's eulogies should be interpreted as a statement (thus as an indicative) instead of a wish (optative). This suggestion seems acceptable as these forms of prayer are presented more like a tribute or praise to God, introduced with a statement rather than a wish.

**TABLE 6.1:** Prayers of worship and adoration in the Pauline Epistles.

<b>Pauline Letter</b>	<b>Worship and adoration<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>Romans</b>	<p><b>1:25</b></p> <p>τὸν κτίσαντα, ὃς ἐστὶν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν</p> <p>the Creator, who is <b>blessed</b> forever! Amen.</p> <p><b>9:5</b></p> <p>ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.</p> <p>who is over all, God <b>blessed</b> forever. Amen.</p> <p><b>11:33–36</b></p> <p>ὅ βάθος πλοῦτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως θεοῦ· ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ.<sup>34</sup> τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου; ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο; <sup>35</sup> ἢ τίς προέδωκεν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀνταποδοθήσεται αὐτῷ; <sup>36</sup> ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα· αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν.</p> <p>O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! <sup>34</sup> For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? <sup>35</sup> Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return? <sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the <b>glory</b> forever. Amen.</p> <p><b>16:25–27</b></p> <p><sup>25</sup> Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑμᾶς στηρίζαι κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου χρόνοις αἰώνιους σεσιγημένου <sup>26</sup> φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν διὰ τε γραφῶν προφητικῶν κατ’ ἐπιταγὴν τοῦ αἰωνίου θεοῦ εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη γνωρισθέντος, <sup>27</sup> μόνῳ σοφῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν.</p> <p><sup>25</sup> Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup> but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the <b>glory</b> forever! Amen.</p>
<b>1 Corinthians</b>	<p><b>8:6</b></p> <p>ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ.</p> <p>yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.</p>
<b>2 Corinthians</b>	<p><b>1:3–7</b></p> <p><sup>3</sup> Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ πατήρ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν καὶ θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως,</p> <p><sup>4</sup> ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν, εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως ἧς παρακαλοῦμεθα αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> ὅτι καθὼς περισσεύει τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς, οὕτως διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ περισσεύει καὶ ἡ παράκλησις ἡμῶν.</p> <p><sup>6</sup> εἴτε δὲ θλιβόμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως καὶ σωτηρίας· εἴτε παρακαλοῦμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως ἢ τῆς ἐνεργουμένης ἐν ὑπομονῇ τῶν αὐτῶν παθημάτων ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς πάσχομεν,</p> <p><sup>7</sup> καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν βεβαία ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· εἰδότες ὅτι ὡς κοινωνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων, οὕτως καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως.</p>

(Table 6.1 continues on the next page)



**TABLE 6.1 (cont.):** Prayers of worship and adoration in the Pauline Epistles.

Pauline Letter	Worship and adoration <sup>a</sup>
<b>2 Corinthians</b>	<p><sup>3</sup> <b>Blessed</b> be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation,</p> <p><sup>4</sup> who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.</p> <p><sup>6</sup> If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering.</p> <p><sup>7</sup> Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.</p> <p><b>11:31</b></p> <p><sup>31</sup> ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ οἶδεν, ὃ ὢν <b>εὐλογητὸς</b> εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ὅτι οὐ ψεύδομαι.</p> <p><sup>31</sup> The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (<b>blessed</b> be he forever!) knows that I do not lie.</p>
<b>Galatians</b>	<p><b>1:3-5</b></p> <p><sup>3</sup> χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,</p> <p><sup>4</sup> τὸ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ὅπως ἐξέλῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος ἰσχυροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, <sup>5</sup> ᾧ ἡ <b>δόξα</b> εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων · ἀμήν.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be the <b>glory</b> forever and ever. Amen.</p>
<b>Ephesians</b>	<p><b>1:3-14</b></p> <p><sup>3</sup> <b>Εὐλογητὸς</b> ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλόγησας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ, <sup>4</sup> καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, <sup>5</sup> προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, <sup>6</sup> εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ,</p> <p><sup>7</sup> ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος ἰσχυροῦ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ <sup>8</sup> ἧς ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει <sup>9</sup> γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ <sup>10</sup> εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς · ἐν αὐτῷ, <sup>11</sup> ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργούντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, <sup>12</sup> εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ τοὺς προηλεκτούς ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ · <sup>13</sup> ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ, <sup>14</sup> ὃ ἐστὶν ἀραβῶν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιτομῆως, εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> <b>Blessed</b> be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. <sup>5</sup> He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in Heaven and things on Earth. <sup>11</sup> In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup> so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup> this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.</p>

(Table 6.1 continues on the next page)

**TABLE 6.1 (cont.):** Prayers of worship and adoration in the Pauline Epistles.

Pauline Letter	Worship and adoration <sup>a</sup>
<b>Philippians</b>	<b>4:20</b>  τῷ δὲ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ ἡμῶν ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων · ἀμήν.  <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be <b>glory</b> forever and ever. Amen.
<b>Colossians</b>	<b>1:15–20</b>  <sup>15</sup> ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀόρατου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, <sup>16</sup> ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται, <sup>17</sup> καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν. <sup>18</sup> καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχὴ, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων, <sup>19</sup> ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι <sup>20</sup> καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, [δι’ αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.  <sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup> for in him all things in Heaven and on Earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on Earth or in Heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.
<b>1 Thessalonians</b>	–
<b>2 Thessalonians</b>	–
<b>1 Timothy</b>	<b>1:17</b>  τῷ δὲ βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων, ἀφθάρτῳ, ἀόρατῳ, μόνῳ θεῷ, τιμῇ καὶ δόξῃ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων · ἀμήν.  <sup>17</sup> To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and <b>glory</b> forever and ever. <sup>[b]</sup> Amen.  <b>3:16</b>  καὶ ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον · Ὃς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι, ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις, ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν, ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ.  Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.  <b>6:16</b>  ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν, φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον, ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται · ὃ <b>τιμῇ καὶ κράτος αἰώνιον</b> · ἀμήν.  It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be <b>honor and eternal dominion</b> . Amen.
<b>2 Timothy</b>	<b>4:18</b>  ὃ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.  [...] To him be the <b>glory</b> forever and ever. Amen.
<b>Titus</b>	–
<b>Philemon</b>	–

Note: All translations are from the NRSV.

Hagner (2002, p. 162) agrees when he says that these prayers do not express a wish, but rather, they make a declaration. It is a statement or declaration about God 'deserving appreciation, honour, and praise' (Hagner 2002, p. 162). This praise to God seems to have its roots in the Old Testament (OT) (see Hoehner 2002, p. 159). According to Aune (1987, p. 193), these early Christian blessings 'were inherited from Judaism, which used the Hebrew term *baruk*' [blessed]. Paul closely follows the Jewish pattern by using the Greek adjective *εὐλογητός* [blessed]. Romans 1:25; 9:5; Ephesians 1:3-14; and 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 11:31 fall in this category.

## □ Romans 1:25

In the middle of the letter-body of Romans 1:18-15:13, four main arguments are found, namely:

1. the gospel as the righteousness of God by faith (Rm 1:18-4:25)
2. the gospel as the power of God for salvation (Rm 5:1-8:39)
3. the gospel as God's righteousness to Israel and the Gentiles (Rm 9:1-11:36)
4. the gospel as God's righteousness for the transformation of life (Rm 12:1-15:13).

In the first argument in Romans 1:18-4:25, the author first describes the sinfulness and unrighteousness of humankind (Rm 1:18-3:20) before he moves on to persuade the readers that righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ (Rm 3:21-31) and then presents Abraham as an example of someone who was justified by faith (Rm 4:1-25). In Paul's description of the sinfulness of humankind, he focuses specifically on the Gentiles in Romans 1:18-32, while he moves his focus in Romans 2:1-3:8 to the Jewish people, and in Romans 3:9-20 to both the Jewish people and Gentiles. Then, in his description of the Gentiles (Rm 1:18-31), he tells how they live and concludes in Verse 24 that God therefore gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts. In Verse 25, Paul once again refers to the Gentiles who exchanged the truth for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator. When Paul mentions the Creator, his worship and adoration of God as Creator slips into a relative clause with the words 'who is forever praised. Amen' [ὅς ἐστιν εὐλογητός εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας: ἀμήν]. In this case, the verb 'to be' is not omitted (as already discussed).

When Paul says in Verse 25 that the Gentiles exchanged the truth for a lie [μετήλλαξαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ ψεύδει], it is uncertain what this 'truth' [τὴν ἀλήθειαν] refers to. Schreiner, Yarbrough and Jipp (2018, p. 112) are of the opinion that the unrighteousness of the Gentiles described in this passage 'consists in a refusal to worship God' and a 'refusal to honor and glorify God'. The truth that the Gentiles thus suppress is, according to Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 112), that God should be honoured and worshipped as the Creator. Harrison et al. (2017) say that 'despite the knowledge God

conveyed to people’, they did not glorify them. The Gentiles exchanged this truth for a lie, namely, to worship ‘created things rather than the Creator’ (Harrison et al. 2009). In line with this interpretation, it then seems very logical for Paul to slip in a eulogy in a relative clause to describe the Creator – the Creator ‘who is forever praised’. Paul also ends his eulogy with the word ‘amen’ [ἀμήν].<sup>129</sup> By concluding his eulogy with ἀμήν, Paul confirms that the fact that God is forever praised, is indeed true, and his eulogy is thus an affirmation of what he declares in the eulogy. With this eulogy, Paul shows that he still holds on to the truth by praising God – a typical example of the persuasion strategy of *ethos*, where Paul persuades the readers of his true character as a servant of God. Harrison et al. (2009) say that Paul ‘could not resist an outburst’ of praise to God ‘to counteract’ the behaviour of the Gentiles. Paul persuades his readers that ‘God’s glory remains, even though unacknowledged’ by the Gentiles (Harrison et al. 2009). The eulogy thus also serves as the persuasion strategy of *logos* as Paul persuades his readers of the logical fact that God expects humankind to honour him. Through this eulogy, the author also aims to affect the readers in order to persuade them to praise God – thus an example of the persuasion strategy of *pathos*.

This relative clause in Romans 1:25 [ὅς ἐστιν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας] to describe the ‘Creator’ thus appears in the letter-body-middle of this letter to serve as the persuasion strategies of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*.

## □ Romans 9:5

In the third argument (Rm 9:1-11:36), in the middle of the letter-body of Romans, the author focuses on the gospel as God’s righteousness to Israel and the Gentiles. Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 449) say what troubles Paul in this argument is that his fellow Jewish people ‘are separated from Christ’ and therefore ‘not enjoying the promises of God’s saving righteousness’. In the first five verses, the author expresses his sorrow and anguish because of this (vv. 2-3) and shows in Verses 4-5 that God gave them all the privileges they needed – adoption (Rm 9:4), divine glory (Rm 9:4), the covenants (Rm 9:4), the receiving of the law (Rm 9:4), the temple worship and promises (Rm 9:4), and the patriarchs (Rm 9:5). The author then concludes in Verse 6 that God’s word has not failed. God thus remained faithful to his promises (see Schreiner et al. 2018, p. 450).

Verse 5 gives the last privilege God gave to Israel, namely, their forefathers who received the promise of salvation [ὧν οἱ πατέρες].

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129. Louw and Nida (1988, p. 673) explain that ἀμήν is a ‘strong affirmation of what is declared’, meaning ‘truly, indeed, it is true that’.

The reference to the patriarchs or forefathers in Verse 5 is a reminder of God's promise to Israel.<sup>130</sup> These forefathers are further described as 'from whom the human ancestry of Christ is' [ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα]. Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 462) say the reference to Christ in Verse 5 is the climax, as through him came the 'fulfilment of the promises' to the forefathers of Israel. Christ is then further described as the One 'who is God over all' [ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεός]. Another interpretation of these words is possible – the word θεός can also be interpreted to be part of the eulogy as 'blessed is God' [θεὸς εὐλογητός], while the previous words can then be translated as Christ 'who is over all' [ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων]. Harris (1992, p. 171) considers the Christology of the Pauline Letters and he is of the opinion that it is not impossible that Paul would refer to Jesus as 'God'. Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 463) say that identifying Christ with God in this context seems to 'fit more naturally into the context'. To translate the phrases as 'Christ who is God over all', makes sense as the author then not only experiences sorrow because the Israelites rejected Christ who is related to them, but also Christ who 'shares the divine nature' of God (see also Harrison, Hagner & Rapa 2009). With this in mind, together with the position of θεός before εὐλογητός, and the absence of the article of θεός, it seems acceptable to interpret the eulogy εὐλογητός εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν as an outbreak of praise to Christ who is divine. Van Houwelingen (2019, p. 135) refers to Christ's 'double passport' – being both human and divine.

With this eulogy at the end of Verse 5, the argument reaches a point of climax before the author moves on to Verse 6 where he concludes that God has thus not failed the Israelites; that God remained faithful to them. This eulogy serves the persuasion strategies of *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. With this eulogy, the author persuades his readers that he is not part of the 'Israelites' who rejected God as he is still willing to praise God. He thus persuades the readers, as believers, of his character [*ethos*]. One can also interpret the eulogy aimed at the readers to persuade them to join the author in holding on to God [*pathos*]. By uttering praise to God, the author also convinces his readers of the fact [*logos*] that God deserves praise and not rejection.

## □ 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

The Corinthians were Paul's problem church as they failed to be different from the non-Christians. After Paul sent the First Corinthian letter, Timothy went to Corinth but could not manage the problems. Then Paul had to go again and it was a painful visit. Paul was insulted, and after he left he wrote

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130. The forefathers are understood to be Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as we read in Exodus 3:15.

them a ‘tearful’ letter (2 Cor 2:4). As the Corinthians were still negative about Paul, he had to defend himself.

In the letter-opening, directly after the greetings, a eulogy is found in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. The praise to God is introduced in Verse 3 with the words ‘εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ’ [blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ]. God is thus praised as the father of Jesus. and he is praised in Verses 3-7 for being:

1. the Father of *compassion* (ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν, 2 Cor 1:3)
2. the God of all *comfort* (θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως, 2 Cor 1:3).

The author makes it clear that God is the one who comforts those in trouble (ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν, 2 Cor 1:4a) in that, ‘we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God’ (εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως ἧς παρακαλούμεθα αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, 2 Cor 1:4b). These two attributes of God, his compassion and comfort, serve humankind in their sufferings. The author motivates this statement about the attributes of God in 2 Corinthians 1:5-7 with an explanation of why in the midst of one’s suffering one becomes equipped to communicate God’s comfort. He explains that the greater the suffering, the greater the comfort, and the greater the ability to comfort others. Paul refers to his own suffering – how God’s strength enabled him to endure it and be comforted (see eds. Verbrugge et al. 2008) and he shows the relationship between afflictions and consolation (see Matera 2003, p. 42). How should one understand Paul’s statement in Verse 6 that his own sufferings and consolation benefitted the readers? Matera (2003, p. 42) seems to be correct in saying that Paul wanted the Corinthians to be assured by his testimony that in their sufferings they would also find consolation as he did. He wants them to understand that ‘God is at work in weakness’ (Matera 2003, p. 42).

Welborn (2001, p. 58) says this blessing in these verses is used not only to express the author’s praise but also to ‘mentor the readers in proper Christian response to suffering’. For Guthrie (2015), this benediction is all about encouragement. In line with these opinions on the function of the eulogy in these verses, one can say that it serves as the persuasion strategies of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. On the one hand, Paul persuades the readers of his true relationship with God as he praises God for what he has done in his life [*ethos*]. On the other hand, Paul also aims to influence the readers in such a way as to move them to handle suffering in the same way as he did [*pathos*]. However, all of this can only be done once the readers are persuaded of the comforting character of God, of God as the source of mercy and consolation as experienced by Paul (see Matera 2003, p. 41), and that is why this eulogy can also be regarded as an example of the persuasion strategy of *logos*.

Matera (2003, p. 41) is of the opinion that the repetition of words such as 'comfort', 'affliction' and 'suffering' in the eulogy introduces themes later developed in the letter. The theme of comfort resonates throughout Chapters 1-9 of this letter (Hubbard 2002, p. 168). One finds the theme of comfort in: 2 Corinthians 2:7; 2:14-16; 4:8-12; 7:6-7; 5:4-5 and 6:2-12. It can be added that the theme of suffering and affliction runs through 2 Corinthians 1:8; 4:8-10; 6:4-5; 11:23-28 and 12:10. One can, however, also see the eulogy as a way to emotionally prepare the readers for the arguments to follow in the letter. Welborn (2001, p. 40) says that with the eulogy in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, the author introduces very briefly and generally the affliction (πάση τῇ θλίψει, 2 Cor 1:4) and suffering (παθημάτων ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς πάσχομεν, 2 Cor 1:6). Then, in the opening of the letter-body in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, the author introduces the letter-body with his own story of suffering and affliction. After briefly introducing the theme of affliction and suffering in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, the author now zooms in on his own circumstances of suffering in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 in order to gain the readers' pity, so that he can discuss his hardships again in 2 Corinthians 6:3-12 with the aim of persuading the readers of how these fellow-workers commend themselves in every way.

These five verses thus serve as a formal eulogy in the letter-opening to state facts about God's comfort and compassion; to introduce themes developed in the letter; to persuade the readers of the author's experience of God's comfort and consolation; and to encourage the readers to follow his example.

## □ 2 Corinthians 11:31

In the letter-body middle, where Paul boasts about his sufferings, one finds a eulogy in a relative clause describing God. Paul claims that he can indeed boast about his identity (2 Cor 11:22-23) and his sufferings (2 Cor 11:23-27). In Verse 30, however, he says he rather chooses to boast about his weakness and then confirms his statement by saying that God knows that he is not lying about it (ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ οἶδεν, [...] ὅτι οὐ ψεύδομαι, 2 Cor 11:31). Verse 31 is Paul's oath (Guthrie 2015, p. 573). Verbrugge et al. (2008) explain that after Paul's incredible list of afflictions and perils, he was forced to appeal to 'divine omniscience'. It is not clear whether this oath is retrospective (with regard to what he has said), prospective (with regard to what he is about to say) or undergirding the statement in Verse 30 (see Matera 2003, p. 272). What is clear, however, is that against the backdrop of those judging his integrity, such an oath was necessary. After his 'painful visit' (see 2 Cor 2:1), Paul might have found it important to show that he was different from the 'false apostles' he refers to in 2 Corinthians 11:13. Guthrie (2015, p. 573) says that Paul shows through this oath in 2 Corinthians 11:31 that his ministry of hardship and the integrity of his ministry is grounded in his relationship with God. While Paul offers God as guarantee of what he

testifies about himself, he brings in a eulogy to God while he refers to him by saying ‘God [...] who is to be forever praised’ (ὁ ὢν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, 2 Cor 11:31).

Through this eulogy, Paul strengthens his attempt to persuade the readers of his integrity and his honest relationship with God. By adding to his oath this sentence of praise in a relative clause to ὁ Θεὸς καὶ Πατὴρ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, Paul makes use of the persuasion strategies of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. By bursting out in praise because of God, he persuades his readers of his willingness to praise God forever and his relationship with God – his honest character [*ethos*]. He also attempts to persuade his readers to join him in this praise [*pathos*] while he states the fact that God is supposed to be praised [*logos*].

## □ Ephesians 1:3-14

Hoehner (2002, pp. 153-161) summarises the different interpretations of Ephesians 1:3-14 since the beginning of the 20th century. In the different interpretations, scholars have different views and have identified different structures of this passage. Ephesians 1:3-14 has been identified as a hymn (Barth 1974; Dahl 1951; Grelot 1989; Inntizer 1904; Maurer 1951), doxology (Bover 1921; Coppieters 1909), eulogy (Barkhuizen 1990; Best 1998; Caragounis 1977; Krämer 1967; Lang 1969; Mußner 1965; O’Brien 1999; Ramaroson 1981), proem (Sanders 1965), baptismal praise (Deichgräber 1967), *berakah* (Fay 1994; Jeal 2000; Kirby 1968), praise (O’Brien 1999; Schnackenburg 1977) and benediction (Grelot 1989).

In the letter-opening of Ephesians, directly after the greeting in Verse 2 and right before the thanksgiving in 2 Corinthians 1:15-23, Paul spontaneously praises God in Verses 3-14. In Ephesians 1:3 the praise to God is introduced with the words ‘εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ’ [blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ]. God is thus praised as God and as the father of Jesus. When Paul says God is blessed, he praises God as One who is worthy of praise,<sup>131</sup> and the reasons for this statement are given in one long sentence with relative clauses and phrases (which has caused much confusion and many debates among scholars):

- **Blessing us** (he who blessed us) in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν χριστῷ, Eph 1:3).
- **Choosing us** (because he chose us) in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, Eph 1:4).

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131. Louw and Nida (1988, p. 430) say εὐλογητὸς means ‘to be worthy of praise or commendation’.



- **Predestining us to be adopted through Christ Jesus**, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves, (προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ, Eph 1:5-7).
- **The role of Jesus explained:** in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of his grace, that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, ἧς ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει, Eph 1:8).
- **Making known to us the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in him (Christ), to the plan of the fulfilment of times, to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth together under one head – namely in him (Christ) (γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· ἐν αὐτῷ, Eph 1:9-10).
- **The role of Jesus explained:** in whom we were chosen when predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory (ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ χριστῷ·, Eph 1:11-12).
- **The role of Jesus explained:** in whom you were (included) when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation (ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, Eph 1:13a).
- **The role of Jesus explained:** in whom you, having believed, were marked with the promised Holy Spirit (ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ, Eph 1:13b).
- **The role of the Holy Spirit explained:** who is a guarantee of our inheritance, until the redemption of (us as) possession (of God) (ὃ ἐστὶν ἄρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως, Eph 1:14a).
- **Conclusion of praise:** to the praise of his glory (εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, Eph 1:14b).

God is thus praised for his work as a Triune God-Father, son and Holy Spirit (Cornelius 2021, p. 3).

God is praised in 2 Corinthians 1:3 as the source of blessings [εὐλογία] (O'Brien 1999, p. 94), and Paul confirms that God blessed humankind with spiritual blessings [εὐλογία πνευματικῆ]. What are these spiritual blessings? Louw and Nida (1988, p. 442) explain that εὐλογία refers to 'significant benefits'. God blessed humankind with things benefitting them in their

spiritual life.<sup>132</sup> In Verse 4, Paul explains what this spiritual blessing is, namely to be chosen [ἐξελέξατο] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless. What follows in Verses 5–14 is a summary of the whole process of being chosen to be holy and blameless:

- being predestined to be adopted in Christ (2 Cor 1:5–7, προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ) and this implies redemption [ἀπολύτρωσιν] and forgiveness [ἄφεσιν] (2 Cor 1:8)
- being informed of God’s will – to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth together under one head (2 Cor 1:9–10, γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ [...] ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) – with both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit involved (2 Cor 1:11–14a).

God is thus praised for the fact that the believers experienced ‘the abundance of God’s grace in the redemption of Christ and in the provision of all insight and wisdom’ (Hagner 2002, p. 225).

The thanksgiving and requests on behalf of the readers in the last part of the letter-opening in 2 Corinthians 1:15–23 are introduced in Verse 15 with διὰ [‘therefore’ or ‘for this reason’]. Paul bases the thanksgiving and requests on the eulogy in 2 Corinthians 1:3–14 in two ways: because he, as the author, has a solid relationship with this God and because this God is who he is, Paul wants to thank God for what he has done for the readers. The Triune God who blesses, chooses, predestines humankind and makes known to humankind the mystery of his will gives Paul enough reason to thank God for the readers’ faith and love and to request him for wisdom and revelation for the readers.

O’Brien (1999, p. 93) says the author of Ephesians aims, with this eulogy, to evoke ‘a *cognitive* and *emotional* response in the readers by reminding’ them of their salvation; however, it also serves as a paragraph introducing key ideas in the rest of the letter. Cohick (2010, p. 41) agrees that it serves both to *inform* as well as to *praise*. As the letter-opening serves not only to greet the readers, but also to get the attention of the readers and introduce them to the topics to be addressed in the rest of the letter, the eulogy in 2 Corinthians 1:3–14 serves the persuasion strategies of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. On the one hand, Paul persuades the readers that he does know and appreciate God – thus persuading them of his good character and trustworthiness [*ethos*]. On the other hand, Paul aims to affect the emotions of the readers, making them feel inclined to be obedient once reminded of what God has done for them

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132. Louw and Nida (1988, pp. 323–324) explain that there are two possibilities for understanding the expression εὐλογία πνευματικῆ in this verse: one can either see it as a reference to benefits coming from the Holy Spirit or as referring to benefits with regard to one’s spiritual life.

[*pathos*]. O’Brien (1999, p. 93) says Paul wishes to persuade the readers in order to respond as he does and give glory to God for all the blessings. He hopes to influence them emotionally in order to get them motivated to read the rest of the letter. As this eulogy also serves to introduce God, it can also be considered an example of logical reasoning [*logos*]. Cohick (2010, p. 41) says it informs as it introduces key ideas and terms that surface later in the letter, and Paul sets these themes within God’s overarching story.

This eulogy indeed serves to introduce the themes of the rest of the letter in the letter-body, presented in Table 6.2.

**TABLE 6.2:** Themes in the eulogy compared to themes in the letter-body.

Theme in eulogy (2 Corinthians)	Theme in letter-body (2 Corinthians)
1:5-8: ‘[...]as predestined to be adopted in Christ through <b>redemption and forgiveness</b> [...]’	Argument 1 in letter-body opening: Sinfulness and <b>salvation</b> 2:1-10:  ‘[...] we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared [...] for us [...]’ (2:10)
1:9-10: ‘[...]to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth <b>together</b> under one head [...]’	Argument 2 in letter-body-opening: Peace and <b>unity</b> 2:11-22:  ‘[...] in him the whole building is joined together [...]’ (2:21)
1:9-10: ‘[...] to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth <b>together</b> under one head [...]’	Argument 3 in letter-body-opening: Gentiles and Jews <b>one body</b> 3:1-6:  ‘[...] members together of one body [...]’ (3:6)
1:5-8: ‘[...] <b>predestined to be adopted in Christ</b> through redemption and forgiveness [...]’	Argument 4 in letter-body-opening: <b>God’s purpose</b> worked out in Christ 3:7-13:  ‘[...] His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus’ (3:11)
1:9-10: ‘[...] to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth <b>together</b> under one head [...]’	Argument 1 in letter-body-middle: Keep the <b>unity</b> of the Spirit 4:1-6:  ‘[...] there is one body [...]’ (4:4)
1:9-10: ‘[...] to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth <b>together</b> under one head [...]’	Argument 2 in letter-body-middle: <b>Gifts</b> enable growth in love as <b>one</b> 4:7-16:  ‘[...] joined and held together [...]’ (4:16)
1:9-10: ‘[...] being informed of <b>God’s will</b> [...] to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth <b>together</b> under one head [...]’	Exhortations in letter-body-middle to serve God in all relations:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live as children of the Light (4:17-5:21)</li> <li>• Exhortations to marriage partners (5:22-33)</li> <li>• Exhortations to families (6:1-4)</li> <li>• Exhortations to slaves and masters (6:5-9)</li> <li>• Put on God’s armour (6:10-18)</li> </ul>

Source: Author’s own work.

The eulogy in Ephesians is thus a typical element in the letter-opening in order to fulfil the rhetorical functions of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* in the following way:

- **ethos:** to persuade the readers of the author's appreciation of God
- **pathos:** to persuade the readers to be obedient to God who blessed them
- **logos:** to persuade the readers of the character of God and to introduce the key themes of the letter.

## □ Conclusive

Eulogies appear in the Pauline Letters, either in relative clauses in arguments to bring praise to God (Rm 1:25; 9:5; 2 Cor 11:31) or as separate formal eulogies or hymns in the letter-openings (2 Cor 1:3–7; Eph 1:3–14). In all these cases, the eulogies include the word εὐλογητός and serve as the persuasion strategies of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. The two formal eulogies in the letter-openings of 2 Corinthians and Ephesians, however, also serve to introduce the key themes in the letters.

## ■ Doxology

A doxology is a prayer in the form of a hymn as praise to God. Aune (1987, pp. 193–194) says that this doxology is a formula that ascribes 'glory' [δόξα] to God. Doxologies have three basic elements:

- 'To whom' [αὐτῷ]
- 'be the glory' [ἡ δόξα]
- 'forever. Amen' [εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν].

Collins (2002, p. 45) identifies four typical elements:

- the object of praise
- an expression of praise
- an indication of time
- a confirmatory response.

Collins (2002, pp. 47–48) says that the ἀμήν is a 'choral response', a 'public affirmation' of the praise. Aune (1987, p. 193) admits that these elements in the doxology can be expanded in various ways, and a doxology is usually used to conclude a section of a letter. One finds this formula in Romans 11:36; Galatians 1:5; Philippians 4:20; 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:15–16; and 2 Timothy 4:18.

## □ Romans 11:33–36

In the letter-body-middle of Romans, one finds different arguments. In the argument to persuade the readers about the righteousness of God to both

Israel and the Gentiles (Rm 9:1-11:36), Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 448) identify the following themes:

- God's saving promise to Israel (Rm 9:1-29)
- Israel's rejection of God's saving righteousness (Rm 9:30-11:10)
- God's righteousness in his plan for both Jewish people and Gentiles (Rm 11:11-32)
- a concluding doxology (Rm 11:33-36).

Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 590) say God's righteousness moves Paul to conclude this argument with a doxology in which he is in awe of God. The doxology is introduced with an expression of amazement in v. 33, introduced by the word 'oh!' [ὦ]. In Verse 33a, the amazement is about God's wisdom and knowledge 'Oh, the depth of the riches of both<sup>133</sup> the wisdom and knowledge of God!' [ὦ βάθος πλούτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως θεοῦ]. God is praised for his wisdom and knowledge, and it seems logical to say that these attributes of God are praised against the background of his righteousness in His saving plan – God's wisdom and knowledge became visible in his saving plan. Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 592) say Paul explains that God's saving plan is full of wisdom and knowledge.

In Verse 33b, the amazement about God's wisdom and knowledge in his saving plan is further explained by saying that:

1. His judgements are unsearchable [ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ]
2. His paths are beyond tracing out [καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ].

God is praised for his wisdom and knowledge in the way he judges and in his 'actions in history' (Schreiner et al. 2018, p. 592). God's judgement and actions in history are impossible to comprehend or understand [ἀνεξεραύνητα {...} καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι]<sup>134</sup> (Louw & Nida 1988, p. 383).

Verses 34-35 serve as motivations for Verse 33, which are reasons for why humankind can never comprehend God's actions and judgements, in the form of rhetorical questions:

1. 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?' [τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου **cont.** ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο] (Rm 11:34).
2. 'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?' [ἢ τίς προσέδωκεν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀνταποδοθήσεται αὐτῷ] (Rm 11:35).

Paul quotes these questions from the OT in Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11 with some changes.

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133. See Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 591) who also interprets the first καὶ in Verse 33a to mean 'both'.

134. These adjectives are synonyms.

Verse 36 offers a motivation for why humankind cannot counsel God or give to him so that one can claim from him again: ‘For from him and through him and for him are all things’ [ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα]. Schreiner et al. (2018, p. 595) say that, ‘since God is the source and means of all things, no one could possibly function as his counsellor or expect payment for some service rendered’.

The doxology is concluded with ‘To him be the glory forever! Amen’ [αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμή] (Rm 11:36). After expressing his amazement about God’s wisdom and knowledge in the reality of God’s righteousness for both Jewish people and Gentiles, Paul breaks out in praise. Harrison et al. (2009) say that in the face of the realities, Paul had just discussed in the previous verses – ‘grand, sweeping, and humble realities’ – he cannot but ‘lift his heart in adoring praise to God’. By uttering this praise, Paul persuades his readers of his honest response as a follower of God to the wonderful incomprehensible ways of God and this is an example of the persuasion strategy of *ethos*. Through this doxology, Paul aims at exhorting his readers to turn to this wonderful God – thus a strategy to affect the emotions and behaviour of the readers [*pathos*]. Paul offers the complete contents of this doxology as facts about God’s righteousness to both the Jewish people and Gentiles and this is the use of the persuasion strategy of *logos*. This doxology is a hymn used as a way to conclude an argument with contents that force its hearers to break out in praise, to be affected in their lives, to know exactly who God is, and to trust their author.

## □ Romans 16:25–27

Romans 16:25–27 brings with it a few problems in the process of interpretation. Harrison et al. (2009) refer to different positions of these verses in different manuscripts,<sup>135</sup> and scholars’ opinions on non-typical terms, style, and content in these verses (also read Schreiner et al. 2018, p. 766).

Paul closes his letter in Chapter 16 with personal greetings, (Rm 16:1–16), last instructions (Rm 16:17–19), promises and benediction (Rm 16:20), secondary greetings (Rm 16:21–24) and a doxology (Rm 16:25–27) instead of the typical greeting. It is true that Verse 20b resembles the typical benediction of grace that Paul usually closes his letters with, namely ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you’. However, then follow Verses 21–24 with secondary greetings. The doxology then seems to be a perfect way to close the letter after the secondary greetings (Aune 1987, p. 193; Harrison et al. 2009).

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135. Harrison et al. (2009) show how most important manuscripts have these verses at the end of the letter; some have it after Romans 14:23, one after 15:33, and a few others have it after 14:23 and 16:24.

In the doxology in Verse 25, Paul praises God for being able to strengthen the readers [Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑμᾶς στηριξάει]. God’s ability to strengthen the readers is further explained. Paul adds that God is able to strengthen them according to his gospel [κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου], according to Jesus’ proclamation [καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ], and according to the revelation of the mystery [κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου]. When the revelation of the mystery is mentioned in Verse 25, Paul explains that the mystery was *hidden* or kept secret for a long time (v. 25) but is now disclosed and made known through the *prophetic* writings (v. 26). This mystery is made known according to the command of the *eternal* God, and the purpose for this revelation of the mystery is given in Verse 26 as ‘to bring about the obedience of faith’ [εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως].

What is interesting about the contents of this doxology, is that it almost summarises the contents of the letter-opening. Paul brings praise to God in Romans 16:27: ‘to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen’ and the contents of the motivation in Verses 25–26 for this praise reach back to what has been presented in the letter-opening of Romans (see Table 6.3).

**TABLE 6.3:** Contents of doxology compared to contents of letter-opening.

Contents of doxology (Rm 16:25–27)	Contents of letter-opening (Rm 1:1–17)
‘God can <i>strengthen</i> you’ (16:25) [στηριξάει]	‘I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to <i>strengthen</i> you’ (1:11) [εἰς τὸ στηριχθῆναι]
‘According to <i>my Gospel</i> ’ <sup>136</sup> (16:25)	‘Paul called as an <i>apostle</i> and set apart for the <i>Gospel</i> of God’ (1:1)
‘According to the <i>proclamation of Jesus</i> ’ <sup>137</sup> (16:25)	‘I serve [...] by <i>announcing the Gospel of His Son</i> ’ (1:9) ‘the <i>Gospel</i> [...] the power of God for <i>salvation</i> ’ [...] (1:16) ‘regarding <i>His Son</i> [...] <i>Son of God</i> [...] <i>resurrection</i> [...]’ (1:3–4)
‘According to the <i>revelation</i> of the mystery’ (16:25) [ἀποκάλυψιν]	‘the righteousness of God is <i>revealed</i> through faith for faith’ (1:17) [ἀποκαλύπτεται]
‘Mystery [...] but is now disclosed, and through the <i>prophetic writings</i> is made known to all the <i>Gentiles</i> ’ (16:26)	‘(the gospel) he promised beforehand through his <i>prophets in the Holy Scriptures</i> ’ (1:2) ‘we have received [...] <i>apostleship</i> [...] to bring about the obedience [...] among <i>all the Gentiles</i> ’ [...] (1:5) ‘I am a debtor both to <i>Greeks</i> and <i>barbarians</i> [...]’ (1:14)
‘(with the purpose) to bring about the <i>obedience of faith</i> ’ (16:26)	‘to bring about the <i>obedience of faith</i> among all the <i>Gentiles</i> ’ (1:5)

Source: Author’s own work.

136. The genitive in τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου is interpreted as a subjective genitive to mean that Paul refers to himself preaching the gospel.

137. The genitive in τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is interpreted as an objective genitive to mean that Paul refers to the proclamation or preaching about Jesus (see Harrison et al. 2009). Schreiner et al. (2018:766) say it refers to the gospel’s content.

Harrison et al. (2009) are of the opinion that the references to *στηρίζαι* (Rm 16:25) and *στηριχθῆναι* (Rm 1:11) are different in the sense that Romans 16:25 refers to *God* strengthening the readers, while Romans 1:11 refers to *Paul* strengthening the readers. In Romans 1:11, however, Paul says he longs to see them so that he may impart to them ‘some spiritual gift’ to make them strong. Swindoll (2015, p. 24) explains that these spiritual gifts Paul wishes to share with them are probably Paul’s own spiritual gifts, his gifts of knowledge, wisdom and apostleship. Paul planned to share with his readers what he had in order for them to be strengthened. Romans 16:25 thus does not indicate Paul’s act of strengthening the readers, but Paul’s contribution to them being strengthened. When Paul praises God in Romans 16:25, then as the one who can strengthen them, Paul reaches back to Romans 1:11 where he longed to contribute to this act of God.

Swindoll (2015, p. 379) says that this doxology ‘reflects the message of the letter’. It thus seems as if this doxology in Romans 16:25–27 not only concludes a section of the letter (as suggested by Aune 1987, p. 193), but it concludes the complete letter, summarising what Paul wrote in the letter-opening, reflecting the message of the letter.

The doxology as a whole not only reflects the message of the letter and does not only conclude the letter, but it also serves as a persuasion strategy to convince the readers of the author’s willingness to glorify God (his honest character – *ethos*), of the fact that God should be glorified [*logos*] and to exhort the readers to follow Paul’s example [*pathos*].

## □ Galatians 1:5

In the letter-opening (Gl 1:1–5), one only finds the name of the sender (v. 1), the names of the recipients (v. 2) and the greeting (vv. 3–5). The greeting consists of the typical greeting formula *χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη* (Gl 1:3). The ‘grace’ and ‘peace’ then are elaborated on in the sense that it is stated that the grace and peace comes from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ [*ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*]. The source of the grace and peace, namely God in Jesus, is then further explained in Verse 4 by the statement in an adjectival clause that Jesus gave himself for our sins [*τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν*] with the purpose to rescue us from the present evil age [*ὅπως ἐξέλθῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ*]. The greeting is completed with an acknowledgement that all of this happened according to the will of God [*κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν*]. While the author explains that Jesus rescued us according to the will of God, he cannot but burst out in praise in Verse 5 in a relative clause – ‘to whom be glory for ever and ever’ [*ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*] – and it is closed with the word *ἀμήν*. Harrison et al. (2009) say that ‘Paul is moved to doxological praise’ when he mentions the death of Jesus according to the will of God.



Harrison et al. (2009) are of the opinion that the praise here in Verse 5 is essential as the deliverance in Jesus is a key concept in the gospel and an issue among the Galatians.

Moo (2013, p. 74) explains that one can either imagine the optative form of εἶναι in Verse 5 to express a wish 'let there be glory' or the indicative form to express a statement 'on whom there is glory to God'. Moo (2013, p. 74) says that perhaps Paul had both forms in mind – to make the statement that God is glorious, but also to wish that the reader might acknowledge that God should be honoured.

De Boer (2011, p. 36) explains that the doxology is an appropriate answer to the current status of the Galatians, namely that they are rescued. This makes sense when one reads what Bray (2011, p. 1) says about the historical background of the Galatians. Bray explains that the Galatians were deceived by false prophets and needed to be brought back to the gospel. Paul thus realised that the Galatians had to be reminded of the essence of the gospel, namely that they were rescued through Christ by the will of God – and it is then after he mentioned it in Galatians 1:3-4 that Paul glorifies God in Verse 5. One can say that Paul not only glorifies God as an honest believer [*ethos*], that he not only states the fact that God should be glorified [*logos*], but that he mainly aims at persuading the Galatians to turn back to the gospel and realise their different status [*pathos*].

## □ Philippians 4:20

A doxology is found at the very end of the letter-body-closing (Phlp 4:10-20) of Philippians. In this closing argument, Paul communicates his thankfulness. He is thankful for the Philippians' renewed concern for him (Phlp 4:10), for sharing in his troubles (Phlp 4:14), for sharing with him in the matter of giving and receiving when he set out from Macedonia (Phlp 4:15), for assisting him in Thessalonica (Phlp 4:16) and for sending him gifts (Phlp 4:18). In Verse 18, he indicates that the Philippians' behaviour is pleasing to God (Phlp 4:18) and then he promises the Philippians in Verse 19 that God will meet all their needs 'according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus'.

Thinking of God's glorious riches causes Paul to burst out in praise in Verse 20. Verse 20 closes this argument with a doxology: 'to our God and Father be **glory** for ever and ever' [τῷ δὲ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ ἡμῶν ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων]. The doxology is closed with 'amen' [ἀμήν]. Klein et al. (2006) note how Paul opened this argument by rejoicing in the Lord (Phlp 4:10) and then closed it with a doxology (Phlp 4:20). Paul realises that although the Philippians contributed to his missionary work, the actual praise should go to God (see Swindoll 2017, p. 96).

This whole argument communicates positive emotions from the side of Paul. It aims at persuading the Philippians that he does care for them and appreciates them (promoting his *ethos*). In the same sense, Paul exhorts the Philippians to proceed with their caring and giving, as it pleases God, and promises that God will meet their needs in answer to that. One can thus see this argument not only as *ethos* but also as *pathos* in an attempt to persuade the Philippians to feel good about their own behaviour and to proceed with it. Klein et al. (2006) say that the ties that bind the Philippians and Paul 'are not simply the bonds of friendship but their common bonds in service to God'. Cousar (2009, p. 90) refers to the 'warm and lasting relationship' between them. Arnold (2002) says that Paul makes it clear in this argument that he 'entered into a unique relationship with the Philippians'.

This doxology thus concludes the letter-body-closing and serves as the persuasion strategies of *ethos* and *pathos* in the argument.

## □ 1 Timothy 1:17

As Timothy needed support and advice on how to handle the false teachers in the Ephesian church (Thomas & Köstenberger 2006), Paul did not waste time with a lengthy letter-opening before he jumped in with his first argument. Thomas and Köstenberger (2006) interpret the very first argument (1 Tm 1:3–20) of the letter-body of 1 Timothy as an argument in which Paul makes some personal charges to Timothy:

- the challenge of false teachers (1 Tm 1:3–11)
- Paul's testimony (1 Tm 1:12–17)
- an exhortation to Timothy (1 Tm 1:18–20).

Paul focuses first on Timothy and then immediately addresses the issue of the false teachers (1 Tm 1:3–11). One then finds an argument that resembles the typical thanksgiving in the Pauline Letters: 'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord [...]' (1 Tm 1:12–17). The difference, however, is that Paul does not thank God for the readers (like in the typical Pauline thanksgivings) but rather thanks God for God's grace for himself. Verses 12–17 serve mainly to persuade Timothy of God's involvement in Paul's life, stated as facts (*logos*). Paul testifies to:

- God strengthening him (1 Tm 1:12)
- God considering him faithful and appointing him to service (1 Tm 1:12)
- God showing him mercy (1 Tm 1:13)
- God pouring out grace, faith and love on him (1 Tm 1:14, 16).

After this testimony to God's grace in his personal life, Paul closes this section with a doxology in Verse 17: 'to the eternal, immortal, invisible, only King, be honour and *glory* for ever and ever: Amen' (NRSV) [τῷ δὲ βασιλεῖ τῶν

αἰώνων, ἀφθάρτῳ, ἀοράτῳ, μόνῳ θεῷ, τιμῇ καὶ δόξῃ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων: ἀμήν]. With this doxology, Paul persuades Timothy of his honest thankfulness to God and of his willingness to honour God – a typical example of the persuasion strategy of *ethos*.

Collins (2002, pp. 45–48) focuses on the expansion of the normal doxology formula in this letter. The object of praise, namely God, is described in detail as τῷ δὲ βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων, ἀφθάρτῳ, ἀοράτῳ, μόνῳ θεῷ. This phrase can literally be translated as ‘King of the ages, the incorruptible and invisible one, the only God’. According to Collins (2002, p. 46) this characterisation of ‘the only God’ communicates that God is superior to ‘any human ruler whose reign is limited to only one age’, and he argues that the adjectives used to describe this king are typical examples of Greek philosophical language. Swindoll (2014, p. 27) shows how these characterisations of God came from the OT: ‘eternal king’ (Ex 15:18; Ps 145:13), ‘immortal’ (Ps 90:2; 102:26–27), ‘invisible’ (Job 23:8–9) and ‘only God’ (Dt 4:35; Is 44:6).

Swindoll (2014, p. 27) says that, ‘having reviewed his own testimony of divine mercy and transforming grace’, Paul could only respond in praise. The God who transformed him, a ‘maniacal religious murderer’, so dramatically into a follower deserves praise. With this doxology, Paul expresses his acknowledgement of God as superior, his gratitude towards God and his submissiveness. Through his testimony, Paul persuades his readers of his honest character – his *ethos*. This testimony and doxology contain facts and serve as a persuasion strategy of *logos*. If Paul can persuade Timothy through this doxology to also be thankful to God for his role in his life, Paul will have succeeded in his use of the persuasion strategy of *pathos*.

There seems to be an interesting resemblance between this doxology and the other in 1 Timothy 6:15–16 (Collins 2002, p. 166), which will be discussed in the following section.

## □ 1 Timothy 6:15–16

At the end of the letter-body,<sup>138</sup> Paul turns the focus to Timothy when he exhorts him as ‘man of God’ (1 Tm 6:11) to ‘shun all this’,<sup>139</sup> to ‘pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness’. In Verse 12, Paul proceeds with the exhortation: ‘Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made

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138. Thomas and Köstenberger (2006) and Collins (2002, p. 160) refer to this passage as a ‘final exhortation’ to Timothy.

139. The ταῦτα in 1 Timothy 6:11 refers to the vices mentioned in Verses 3–10.

the good confession in the presence of many witnesses'. Thomas and Köstenberger (2006) say that Paul wants Timothy to be 'everything the heretics are not'.

Paul concludes these personal instructions to Timothy by saying, in Verses 13–14, that he charges or commands him 'in the presence of God [...] and (in the presence) of Christ Jesus [...] to keep the commandment [...] until the manifestation (of our Lord Jesus Christ)' [μέχρι τῆς ἐπιφανείας τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ]. The 'manifestation' [τῆς ἐπιφανείας] is then further described by the *adjective clause* in 1 Timothy 6:15a: ἦν καιροῖς ἰδίοις δείξει [which he will bring in his own time]. The subject of the *verb* δείξει is then given as 'ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος Δυνάστης, ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ Κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων' [the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords].

The 'ultimate King' [ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων] and 'supreme Lord' [Κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων] is then further described by two *relative clauses*:

- 'ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν, φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον' [who alone has immortality, while dwelling in unapproachable light]<sup>140</sup>
- 'ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται' [whom no one has ever seen or can see].

Paul declares that this ultimate King and supreme Lord is the *only* [μόνος] one having immortality and one who cannot and has not been seen. This description of who God is then closes with a phrase of praise: 'to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen' [ᾧ τιμὴ καὶ κράτος αἰώνιον: ἀμήν]. Collins (2002, p. 161) says that Paul praises God as 'to God alone belong the attributes of beatitude and immortality, for he alone is the blessed'. God is praised as 'ruler', 'king' and 'lord', and Thomas and Köstenberger (2006) note that these descriptions of God confirm that God is sovereign over human affairs and it 'is lending further weight to Paul's charge to Timothy'. This doxology thus not only concludes the final exhortations, but it also contributes to the effectiveness of the argument. The doxology serves as the persuasion strategies of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, as Paul not only presents facts about God [*logos*] but also communicates something about his own perception of God [*ethos*] in order to affect Timothy emotionally to praise God in the same way [*pathos*].

An interesting fact is that some elements in this doxology in 1 Timothy 1:17 are almost repeated in 1 Timothy 6:16 (see Table 6.4).

While the contents of both doxologies are similar, more words are used in 1 Timothy 6:15–16 to communicate the same characteristics one finds in 1 Timothy 1:17. In both doxologies, the object of praise, an expression of praise, an indication of time, and a confirmatory response are observable.

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140. Translated by author of this chapter.

**TABLE 6.4:** 1 Timothy 1:17 compared to 1 Timothy 6:15–16.

1 Timothy 1:17	1 Timothy 6:15–16
‘τῷ δὲ βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων’ [to the King of the ages] (1:17a)	‘Ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ Κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων’ [the king of the kings and the Lord of the lords] (6:15c)
‘ἀφθάρτῳ’ [the immortal] (1:17b)	‘ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν, φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον’ [who alone has immortality, while dwelling in unapproachable light] (6:16a)
‘ἀοράτῳ’ [and invisible one] (1:17c)	‘ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται’ [whom no one has ever seen or can see] (6:16b)
‘μόνῳ θεῷ’ [the only God] (1:17d)	‘ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης’ [the blessed and only ruler] (6:15b)
‘τιμὴ καὶ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων: ἀμήν’ [be honour and glory for ever and ever: Amen] (1:17e)	‘ὅτι τιμὴ καὶ κράτος αἰώνιον: ἀμήν’ [to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen] (6:16c)

Source: Author’s own work.

The main difference, however, is that the doxology in 1 Timothy 1:17 is in the form of a statement, while 1 Timothy 6:16 is in the form of a relative clause, describing the object of praise. For this reason, the object of praise in 1 Timothy 1:17 is in the dative as an indirect object, while the object of praise in 1 Timothy 6:15–16 is in the nominative. Paul thus makes use of almost the same doxology twice in his letter, most probably to accentuate these specific divine attributes of God and to conclude specific sections in the letter.

## □ 2 Timothy 4:18

The second letter to Timothy closes with Paul’s personal remarks (2 Tm 4:9–18) and final greetings (2 Tm 4:19–22). Thomas and Köstenberger (2006) interpret the section of 2 Timothy 4:9–18 as ‘recent news’. This section, however, is about more than only recent news. In the personal remarks, Paul requests Timothy to come to him (2 Tm 4:9–10), to bring Mark with him (2 Tm 4:11) and to bring his cloak and scrolls (2 Tm 4:13). Paul also informs Timothy of recent news that Luke is with him (2 Tm 4:11), of his sending of Tychicus to Ephesus (2 Tm 4:12) and that Alexander had harmed him (2 Tm 4:14). At the same time, he warns Timothy to be on his guard against Alexander (2 Tm 4:15). In Verses 16–17, Paul testifies to God’s mercy and support in difficult times while human beings abandoned him. Verse 18 then concludes this testimony with a statement of his belief that the Lord will rescue him from any evil attack and will bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom [ρύσεται με ὁ κύριος ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔργου πονηροῦ καὶ σώσει εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπουράνιον]. This testimony is concluded with a doxology to God who will rescue him: ‘to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen’ [ὅτι ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων: ἀμήν]. One can agree with Collins (2002, p. 187) that these verses contribute to the letter as a ‘postscript’.

In this case, Aune (1987, p. 193) says that the doxology concludes the central section of the letter. The personal remarks are, however, not part of the letter-body but rather of the letter closing. Although it does conclude a section of the letter, it seems more acceptable to say that it concludes the testimony in the personal remarks.

Paul informs Timothy of his trust in God in difficult times and then bursts out in praise to God. Swindoll (2014, p. 274) says that Paul praises God ‘in the midst of his anguish’. Thomas and Köstenberger (2006) say that with this doxology, Paul ‘reaffirms that his entire life and ministry are dedicated to the glory of God’. It thus says something about the character and life of Paul and serves as the persuasion strategy of *ethos*. This doxology also serves as the persuasion strategies of *pathos* and *logos*. Paul presents his doxology as something real to be imitated by Timothy (*logos* and *pathos*).

## □ Conclusive

Doxologies appear in the Pauline Letters either in relative clauses in arguments to bring glory to God (Gl 1:5; 1 Tm 6:15–16; 2 Tm 4:18) or as separate formal doxology statements (Rm 11:33–36; 16:25–27; Phlp 4:20; 1 Tm 1:17). In all these cases, the doxologies include the word δόξα and serve as the persuasion strategies of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. The doxologies also serve to conclude different sections in the letters. The doxology in Romans 16:25–27 concludes the letter and has been found to also summarise the contents of the letter-opening and to reflect the message of the letter.

## ■ Confessions of belief

In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15–20 and 1 Timothy 3:16, one finds confessions of belief about God as acts of adoration. These passages do not reflect the typical elements of the doxologies or eulogies in other NT letters introduced by the words εὐλογητός or δόξα. The function of these passages is thus not to worship or praise God but to show admiration and adoration for who he is and what he can do.

## □ Confession in 1 Corinthians 8:6

Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 8:6 that ‘for us’ [ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν] ‘there is but one God’ [εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ]. This statement does not explicitly express praise or glory – no object of praise is indicated and there is no confirmatory response. However, this statement seems like a confession that there is only one God, and this implicitly glorifies God as the One and Only.

In the letter-body-middle of 1 Corinthians, we find Paul’s replies to questions raised in a letter from the Corinthians (see 1 Cor 7:1). In 1

Corinthians 8:1-11:1, Paul answers their questions on ‘meat offered’ to idols and its ‘allowance for Christians provided they neither abuse their freedom by injuring the consciences of the theologically ignorant nor join in idolatrous banquets’ (Gundry 2012, p. 415).

As most of the meat sold in ancient times was meat that came from animals sacrificed in pagan shrines (see Gundry 2012, pp. 418-419), the question of whether or not Christians could consume this meat arose. In 1 Corinthians 8:4, Paul replies, ‘we know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no god but One’. In Verses 5-6, Paul acknowledges that ‘[...] even if there are so-called gods [...] yet for us there is but one God’ [ {...} ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ]. The second part of Verse 6 is a statement about this one God, almost uttered as a creed (1 Cor 8):

God, the Father from whom [ἐξ οὗ] all things came and for whom [εἰς αὐτόν] we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom [δι’ οὗ] all things came and through whom [δι’ αὐτοῦ] we live. (v. 6)

While Paul makes the statement that there is but one God, just before ‘he gets into the meat of his arguments’ (eds. Verbrugge et al. 2008), he declares who this God should be to them as Christians. Verbrugge et al. (eds. 2008) identify this verse as a Christian *Shema* – a Christian form of the Jewish prayer recited twice daily and taken from Scripture in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Deuteronomy 11:13-21 or Numbers 15:37-41. These prayers were recited to declare one’s commitment to God. One finds a Christian form of this *Shema* in Mark 12:29, where Jesus said ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one’.

Paul declares that God is the one who created all and for whom we should live, while Jesus is the one through whom we live because of his crucifixion and through whom we were created. Paul states that there is only one God [εἷς θεός]. With this confession, Paul is making use of the persuasion strategies of *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. On the one hand, he declares what he believes with a statement [*logos*] and persuades his readers of his own faith [*ethos*]. On the other hand, Paul makes an emotional appeal [*pathos*] to the readers, almost suggesting that they are supposed to have known this fact.

## □ Colossians 1:15-20

Bird (2009, p. 47) is correct when he says that Colossians 1:15-20 is ‘the most frequently cited and studied part’ of this letter. Klein et al. (2006) refer to this passage as a ‘poetic reflection’ on Christ. Swindoll (2017, p. 123) identifies Colossians 1:15-20 as a ‘hymn’, based on the person and work of Jesus (see also Swindoll 2017, pp. 123-124) – his authority, supremacy, headship and sufficiency – as an attempt by Paul to refocus

the readers' eyes on God as they struggled with false teachings. That is why Bird (2009, p. 47) calls it the 'Christ-hymn'. Sumney (2008, p. 60) refers to it as a 'poetic confession'. Scholars have discussed Paul's use of some traditional material in this passage; a pre-Christian text, perhaps from Jewish wisdom literature, or even a Christological interpretation of Genesis 1 (see Bird 2009, pp. 47-49).

Why so much focus on who Jesus is so early in the letter? Bird (2009, p. 50) says this hymn 'operates much like a proposition, which sets forth the central thesis of the epistle'. Within the letter-structure of Colossians, this passage fits into the letter-body-opening in which the author prepares his readers for the main arguments in the letter-body-middle. One also needs to interpret this passage against the socio-historical background of the letter. That is why Wright (1991, p. 118) says Colossians 1:15-20 accentuates the difference between Paul's faith and the philosophies that disregarded the value of Christ in the ancient world. Paul writes to a church that was influenced by 'a heresy' that threatened them (see Gundry 2012, p. 456). Bird (2009, p. 51) says this 'poem' is used in this context to create a 'symbolic universe' of 'Christological monotheism' against the philosophies of those times.

Christ is presented to be supreme in the creation - the image of the invisible God (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, Col 1:15a); the firstborn of all creation (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, Col 1:15b); and all things have been created through him and for him (τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται, Col 1:16); Verses 17-18a describe his relation to the universe - he is before all things [αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων]; in him all things are held together [τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν]; and he is the head of the church as body [αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας]. Verses 18b-20 present Christ as supreme in reconciliation for his redemptive role (see Bird 2009, p. 55).

Klein et al. (2006) are of the opinion that Colossians 1:15-20 'reiterate to the Colossians the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ'. According to him, this passage is meant to be a 'confessional doxology'. In this chapter, Colossians 1:15-20 is categorised as a confession as the author confesses his own belief about who Jesus is [*ethos*] and through this confession, he aims to inform his readers with the right information about Jesus [*logos*]. In the whole process, it serves as an exhortation to the Colossians to make this confession their own in words and actions [*pathos*].

Klein et al. (2006) say that, 'notes sounded in this hymn reverberate throughout the letter'. Klein et al. show how Christ is as central in the rest of the letter as it is in the confession (they identify 46 verses out of the 95 in Colossians to be about Christ). They also show how Christ as an image of God (Col 1:15) is echoed in Colossians 3:10; how Christ as the



supreme One in creation (Col 1:16–17) features in Colossians 2:8, 10, 20; how Christ as the head of the church (Col 1:18) comes forward again in Colossians 1:24, 2:19 and 3:15; how the fullness of God (Col 1:19) steps forward again in Colossians 2:10; and how Christ's reconciliation act (Col 1:20) saves the Colossians in Colossians 2:13–15, 2:12 and 3:1–2. This seems to be in line with Swindoll's (2017, p. 110) opinion that the main theme of Colossians is that 'Christ is sufficient as our Lord, our life, and our leader'. One can thus say that this confession introduces the main theme of the letter, namely, Christ.

Directly after this confession, the author focuses on the Colossians' reconciliation in Christ by reminding them in Colossians 1:21–23 of how Jesus died for them and by warning them to 'continue securely established and steadfast in the faith'.

### □ Confession in 1 Timothy 3:16

Paul is concerned in this letter about false teaching (1 Tm 1:3–4) and addresses this issue in Chapter 4. In Chapters 2 and 3, however, he first guides Timothy in administering the church when he provides principles on worship and overseers and deacons. He concludes his teaching on the overseers and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:14–16 with an indication of the purpose of this instruction. He first announces that he plans to visit, but says in Verses 14–15: 'but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth'. It is then, when he mentions the living God in Verse 15, that Paul walks over to a confession of who God is to him. He declares in Verse 16b that God was revealed in flesh [ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί]; vindicated in spirit [ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι]; seen by angels [ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις]; proclaimed among Gentiles [ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν]; believed in throughout the world [ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ]; and taken up in glory [ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ].

The confession is introduced in Verse 16a with an indication that Paul utters a confession on the 'mystery of religion' or 'mystery of faith' [τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον] and this mystery is great, he says [μέγα ἐστίν]. Collins (2002, p. 98) says this shows in the fact that the confession reflects the faith of the church. Paul is also clear on the fact that he is very sure about this confession when he uses the adverb ὁμολογουμένως. The adverb ὁμολογουμένως means 'one must admit' (Louw & Nida 1988, p. 420). Louw and Nida (1988, p. 420) explain that this word pertains to 'what must or should be admitted or acknowledged publicly'. Thomas and Köstenberger (2006) translate it as 'by common consent'. That is why Collins (2002, p. 20) identifies Verses 14–16 as 'the church's great confession'.

Thomas and Köstenberger (2006) see three couplets in this confession with a chiasmic structure (AB-BA-AB). In each couplet, they explain, one sees the link between heavenly and earthly realities:

- ἐν σαρκί flesh (A) / ἐν πνεύματι spirit (B)
- ἀγγέλοις angels (B) / ἐν ἔθνεσιν nations (A)
- ἐν κόσμῳ world (A) / ἐν δόξῃ glory (B).

Paul uses this confession to conclude his indication of the purpose of his letter. Through this confession he reveals his own faith (part of his character - *ethos*), reminds his reader of what the church believes [*logos*] and exhorts the church (through Timothy) to always cling to this confession [*pathos*].

## □ Conclusive

The confessions in 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15–20 and 1 Timothy 3:16 communicate the author’s admiration for and adoration of God. All three confessions reveal the author’s faith and character, remind the readers of their communal faith and exhort the readers to share in the confession. The confession in Colossians 1:15–20 also introduces the main theme of the letter, namely Christ. Like the doxologies, the confession in 1 Timothy 3:16 concludes a particular argument in the letter, namely the author’s discussion of the purpose of his letter.

## ■ Unique perspectives of this corpus in terms of prayer of worship and adoration

Prayers of worship and adoration appear in nine of the thirteen letters attributed to Paul (see Table 6.5).

All main Pauline Letters contain prayers of worship and adoration – four eulogies, two doxologies and three confessions. Among the prison letters,

**TABLE 6.5:** Prayers of worship and adoration in Pauline Letters.

Main letters	Prison letters	Eschatological letters	Pastoral letters	Disputed Pauline Letters
Romans 1:25; 9:5; 16:25–27	Ephesians 1:3–14	<i>1 Thessalonians</i>	1 Timothy 1:17; 3:16	Ephesians 1:3–14
1 Corinthians 8:6	Philippians 4:20	<i>2 Thessalonians</i>	2 Timothy 4:18	Colossians 1:15–20
2 Corinthians 1:3–7; 11:31	Colossians 1:15–20	–	<i>Titus</i>	<i>2 Thessalonians</i>
Galatians 1:5	<i>Philemon</i>	–	–	1 Timothy 1:17
–	–	–	–	2 Timothy 4:18
–	–	–	–	<i>Titus</i>

Source: Author’s own work.

Note: The Pauline Letters in italics do not contain any prayers of worship and adoration.

Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians display prayers of worship and adoration (a eulogy in Ephesians, a doxology in Philippians and a confession in Colossians). There are, however, no worship and adoration prayers in the eschatological letters. Titus is the only pastoral letter not containing a prayer of worship and adoration. Of the so-called disputed Pauline Letters, Ephesians and the two letters to Timothy contain prayers of worship and adoration. What is interesting is that although many scholars speculate whether the author of Ephesians used Colossians as a source or the other way around (see Bird 2009, p. 3; Hering 2006, p. 139; Holtzman 1872), Ephesians and Colossians present two totally different prayers of worship and adoration – in Ephesians, Paul made use of a eulogy, and in Colossians, a confession. The former is more about worship, while the latter is more about adoration.

The Pauline Letters show that worship and adoration can be expressed in either eulogies, doxologies or confessions. The worship and adoration flow from faith, love, acknowledgement and respect from the side of the author. These are prayers in which nothing is requested from God, and repentance does not play a role at all. The author bursts out in praise or adoration (or both) because he is satisfied and full of joy and amazement because of who God is to the believer, or he confesses his faith in God. The author is bearing in mind and reminding himself and his readers of who God is and what he has done for them. The worship and adoration are thus based on the identity and character of God. These utterances of praise and glory are the author's way of seeking the favour of God, and at the same time, it plays a role in strengthening his relationship with God. In uttering the praise or confession, the author also aims to persuade his readers to join him in his act of praise and adoration.

The functions of these prayers in the Pauline Letters are to declare, confirm, confess and reaffirm particular attributes of God. In some instances, these prayers introduce key themes in the letters (e.g. the two formal eulogies in the letter-openings of 2 Cor 1:3-7 and Eph 1:3-14 and the confessions in 1 Tm 3:16 and Col 1:15-20). All the doxologies, as well as the confession in 1 Timothy 3:16, conclude different sections in these letters. It has been found that the confession in Colossians 1:15-20 reflects the message of the letter, while the doxology in Romans 16:25-27 reflects the message of the letter as well as summarises the contents of the letter-opening.

God is praised, worshipped and adored in the Pauline Letters for who he is and what he does (see Table 6.6).

**TABLE 6.6:** Attributes of God as motivation for worship and adoration.

<b>God's attributes as motivation for the eulogies</b>	<b>God's attributes as motivation for the doxologies</b>	<b>God's attributes as motivation for the confessions</b>
God being the <i>Creator</i> (Rm 1:25)	God's <i>wisdom and knowledge</i> (Rm 11:33-36)	God is <i>One God, from whom all things came, for whom we live, and through whom we live</i> (1 Cor 8:6)
Christ who is <i>God over all</i> (Rm 9:5)	God who <i>strengthens</i> (Rm 16:25-27)	<i>Christ's absolute lordship over everything</i> (Col 1:15-20) (see Swindoll 2017, p. 110)
God as <i>father of compassion, comfort and consolation</i> (2 Cor 3:1-7)	God sacrificing Jesus according to His <i>will</i> (Gl 1:5)	God was <i>revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, and taken up in glory</i> (1 Tm 3:16)
God being <i>omniscient and knowing all</i> (2 Cor 11:31)	God's <i>glorious riches</i> (Phlp 4:20)	-
God who <i>blesses, chooses, predestines and makes known His will</i> (Eph 1:3-14)	God as the <i>eternal, immortal, invisible, the ultimate King, ruler and supreme and only Lord</i> (1 Tm 1:17)	-
-	God's <i>mercy and support</i> (2 Tm 4:18)	-

Source: Author's own work.

## ■ Conclusion

How are these Pauline prayers of worship and adoration different from Paul's thanksgivings, intercession prayers and petitions? In the last mentioned prayers, the communication is *with* God. In the prayers of worship and adoration, however, the praise and worship mainly entails communication *with* the readers *about* God – communication *about* God as it is based on the identity and character of God and *with* the readers as it aims at exhorting the readers to partake in this worship as this is what God deserves. These forms of communication can, however, also be seen to be *indirectly* WITH God as the author figuratively bows before God when he praises, worships, acknowledges, adores, and respects God.



# Petition and intercession in the Pauline Epistles

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## ■ Introduction

This chapter deals with petition and intercession in the Letters of Paul, presuming he is the author of the Corpus Paulinum. We divided the textual material into five categories: (1) intercessions made for the readers; (2) intercessions requested from the readers; (3) petitions for or from others; (4) general calls for (continuous) prayer; and (5) closing benedictions. We intend to provide a brief close reading of all relevant texts. After our exegetical survey, we will highlight some distinctive perspectives of these texts and explore their theological contribution with regard to prayer.

We will start by providing an overview of the Greek terminology in the context of petition and intercession.

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Paul uses a variety of terms, with a preference for the verb προσεύχομαι (Eph 6:18; Phil 1:9; Col 1:9; 4:3; 1 Th 5:17, 25; 2 Th 1:11; 3:1) and the substantives προσευχή (Rm 1:10; 15:30; Eph 1:16; 6:18; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2; 1 Tm 2:1; Phlm 4) and δέησις (Rm 10:1; 2 Cor 9:14; Eph 6:18; Phil 1:19; 4:6; 2 Tm 1:4).

In addition, many related terms or expressions are found, such as μνείαν ποιέω (Rm 1:9; Eph 1:16; Phlm 4), ἔχω τὴν περὶ σοῦ μνείαν ἐν ταῖς δεήσεσίν μου (2 Tm 1:4) and κάμπτω τὰ γόνατά μου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα (Eph 3:14); verbs like εὔχομαι (2 Cor 13:7, 9), δέομαι (Rm 1:10; 1 Th 3:10) and αἰτέω (Col 1:9); and, finally, the noun ἔντευξις (1 Tm 2:1).

The frequent use of the aorist optative is noteworthy, expressing Paul's wishes for the recipients of his letters (e.g. in Rm 15:5; Eph 1:17; 3:16).

## ■ Intercessions made for the readers

### ■ For the Romans

#### □ Romans 1:9-10

'For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you.'

#### □ Romans 15:5-6, 13

'May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'

To his great regret, Paul did not yet have the opportunity to visit the Christians in Rome. Therefore, he writes a comprehensive letter. In Romans 1:9-10, the apostle invokes God as his witness, solemnly assuring his readers that he regularly prays for an occasion to visit them. Thomas Schreiner argues that Paul's prayer is not individualistic in nature. It was in the context of his apostolic task that he wanted to visit Rome. And his desire to be with the readers was for their benefit, as the subsequent verses show: by preaching the gospel in Rome, he would strengthen them and obtain fruit among them (Schreiner 1998, p. 50).

In Romans 15:5-6, Paul prays for harmony in the Roman church, including the 'strong' and the 'weak', about whom he wrote in the foregoing chapter. He invokes 'the God of endurance and consolation' [ὁ θεὸς τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως]. Thus, Verse 5 continues from Verse 4, where Paul connects

Scripture with endurance and consolation. He adds that it is God who provides all this. Paul's petition is that the Romans will be unified by learning to love and accept each other in the midst of their differences. Again, it is God who grants unity within the congregation. 'Believers should certainly strive for unity, but ultimately it is a gift of God not a human attainment' (Schreiner 1998, p. 749).

The purpose of Paul's prayer for unity is that the Roman Christians would worship together in harmony, with one voice [ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν ἐνὶ στόματι], in accordance with both the example and the will of Jesus Christ (see also v. 3). The unanimity of the praise in the church will resound loudly in the world. In Romans 15:8-12, Paul shows with a number of texts from Scripture that not only the Jewish people but also the Gentiles will praise God. Finally, he adds in Verse 13 the wish that this harmonious worship will be joyful and full of peace, praying: 'May the God of hope [ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἐλπίδος] make you overflowing with hope [εἰς τὸ περισσεύειν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐλπίδι]'. Paul does not fail to mention the divine source of such abundant hope: The power of the Holy Spirit.

## ■ For the Corinthians

### □ 2 Corinthians 13:7-9

'But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong – not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed [...] This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect.'

In the final chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul expresses his hope that the readers will become at last convinced that he is a true apostle of Christ. The 'test' he is alluding to seems to be a kind of Corinthian self-audit, as Murray Harris puts it, of which the positive result will be inextricably related to Paul's genuine apostleship. To prevent the readers from thinking that he was preoccupied with his own vindication, Paul assures them that his primary concern is their welfare (Harris 2005, pp. 922-923). He prays that the Corinthians may not do anything wrong [μὴ ποιῆσαι ὑμᾶς κακὸν μηδέν] – that is: avoid the wrong course of following the false apostles – and, conversely, that they may do what is right [ὑμεῖς τὸ καλὸν ποιῆτε] – that is: pursue the right course – by recognising Paul as a true apostle of Christ. Summarising, Paul prays that the Corinthians may become 'restored' [τὴν ὑμῶν κατάρτισιν]. The noun κατάρτισις is a New Testament (NT) *hapax* (cf. Eph 4:12: καταρτισμός, another *hapax*). Harris argues convincingly for the rendering 'restoration'; the Corinthians need to return to undivided devotion to Christ, to uninhibited love for Paul and to harmonious fellowship with one another (Harris 2005, pp. 927-928).



## ■ For the Ephesians

### □ Ephesians 1:16–19

‘I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.’

Although the *Novum Testamentum Graece* [Greek New Testament] Nestle-Aland (NA) edition (Institute for New Testament Textual Research 2012) places the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ between square brackets, we consider the letter to the Ephesians as addressed primarily to the church in Ephesus (for the textual evidence, see Hoehner 2002, pp. 144–148 and the literature mentioned there). Paul had been in Ephesus quite a while, according to the book of Acts, yet the letter does not contain many personal details. At the moment of writing the apostle is imprisoned and perhaps this document is his spiritual testament, in which he has a larger audience in mind.

DA Carson observes that Paul, in Chapter 1, prays under the sovereignty of God. The apostle offers intercession that God’s purposes in the salvation of his people may be accomplished (Carson 1992, pp. 172–177). This means for the Ephesians that they might come to know God and his commitment to the believers better. Paul prays first and foremost for spiritual growth and that God will grant them the Holy Spirit (Hoehner 2002, pp. 256–258), who makes possible insight and discloses hidden mysteries. In the subsequent content of Paul’s prayer, three temporal horizons can be distinguished (cf. Floor 2013, pp. 75–76):

- **Looking to the past:** The Christian hope that God will make true what he has promised, a trustful expectation produced by his calling.
- **Looking to the future:** The wealth of God’s (not ‘our’) inheritance that is located in the saints (ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις; cf. Eph 1:1, 4, 13, 15), that is the believers, who are considered God’s heritage.
- **Looking to the present:** The abundance of his divine power, energy, strength, and force (note the four almost synonymous Greek nouns δύναμις, ἐνέργεια, κράτος, and ἰσχύς), which God exercises to the benefit of all believers.

### □ Ephesians 3:14–19

‘For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in Heaven and on Earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with

power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.'

The phrase 'for this reason' points to Ephesians 3:1-13, and surprisingly this pericope also begins with 'for this reason', referring to Chapters 1-2. Paul bows his knees before the heavenly Father, who is committed to saving his people, in order to petition him in prayer. Harold Hoehner lays out the main thought of Verses 16-19 as follows (Hoehner 2002):

Request: that he may grant you [...] to be strengthened [...] in the inner person  
 Result: so that Christ may dwell in your hearts  
 Purpose: that you might be able to comprehend  
 Result: and so to know the love of Christ  
 Purpose: that you might be filled with the fullness of God  
 (p. 476)

We concentrate on the proper petition: 'To be strengthened with power through his Spirit'. While in the prayer of Ephesians 1:17 the Holy Spirit bestows insight and disclosure into the knowledge of God, here the Spirit of God is acting as an agent who transfers the divine power to the believers. Paul specifies that this is not so much a physical strength as a spiritual one: 'in the inner person' [εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον] (cf. Rm 7:22; 12:2; 2 Cor 4:16). This innermost being of the individual believers corresponds with their hearts, where Christ dwells, according to Verse 17. They are in need of being strengthened in their hearts with God's power through his Spirit, resulting in the indwelling of Christ in their lives by means of faith. The dwelling of Christ in the believers and their strengthening by the Spirit are described here as two parallel activities of God (Floor 2013, p. 135).

When the imprisoned apostle prays all this for the Ephesians, the limitation of his actual location seems to be lifted and replaced by the enormous dimensions of the love of Christ. The Christian faith needs to be shared within the global 'communion of the saints'. In praying, even 'all the fullness of God' [πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ] comes into Paul's view, with which the believers may be filled. Being full of God is the ultimate goal of Christian life.

## ■ For the Philippians

### □ Philippians 1:9-11

'And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.'

Paul founded the church in Philippi on his second missionary journey. In his letter to the Philippians, he prays for an abundance of love among them, increasing in understanding and discernment, so that they may be able to decide what is best (εις τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα; Paul uses this very expression in Rm 2:18). Scholars debate whether this expression means something like ‘things that differ’ or ‘superior things’. According to Carson (1992), however, the two notions are not as far apart as some think:

Paul’s thought is that countless decisions in life where it is not a question of making a straightforward decision between right and wrong. What you need is the extraordinary discernment that helps you perceive how things differ, and then make the best possible choice. (p. 127)

Paul’s prayer for the readers has a forward-looking, eschatological dimension. He points to the harvest of righteousness after a period of growth and fruitfulness made possible by Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the Christians in Philippi will be full of the fruit that consists of righteousness [πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης]<sup>141</sup> because of their relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul prays that they may already be pure and blameless as they live their daily lives with a view to the day of Christ [εις ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ]. Their moral behaviour will contribute to the glory and praise of God.

## ■ For the Colossians

### □ Colossians 1:9-12

‘We have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.’

It seems that the church in Colossae had not been founded by Paul but by his co-worker Epaphras, himself a Colossian. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul is praying for Christians he has never met personally. They are ‘his spiritual grandchildren, as it were’ (Carson 1992, p. 98). Paul asks God to fill the readers with the knowledge of his will. Time and again, the apostle emphasises the importance of understanding what God’s will is (Rm 12:2; Eph 5:15-17; cf. 1 Th 4:3; 5:16-18). Wisdom and understanding are not the means to know the will of God, but rather two other qualities that should accompany the knowledge, namely the ability to discern the truth and to make good decisions on that basis (Moo 2008, p. 94). Thus, the perception of God’s will consists of wisdom and understanding at a spiritual level.

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141. Moisés Silva (2005, pp. 51-52) points out that δικαιοσύνης is an epexegetical genitive (cf. Hs 10:12 LXX and Gl 5:22-23).

The purpose of Paul's prayer is that the Colossians might be utterly pleasing to the Lord (cf. 2 Th 1:5: 'worthy of the kingdom of God'). This entails, especially, walking in connection with Jesus Christ (Col 2:6; 3:7; 4:5). Living a life worthy to the Lord means to please him in every way. In Colossians 1:10b-14, Paul outlines what such a life is like. He is using four Greek participles, each of which denotes a characteristic feature of Christian life [καρποφοροῦντες, ἀξιάνομενοι, δυναμούμενοι, εὐχαριστοῦντες]. Paul, then, prays that the readers may bear fruit in every good work, grow in the knowledge of God, be made strong so as to display endurance and patience and give joyful thanks to the Father. The Colossian believers are qualified for a new spiritual status: God has made it possible for Gentiles to have a share in the inheritance that is destined for his covenant people (Eph 1:18; 2:19).

## ■ For the Thessalonians

### □ 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13

'Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face-to-face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.'

### □ 1 Thessalonians 5:23

'May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians arises out of his intense longing to be with them. The apostle and his companions had been forced to leave Thessalonica prematurely. Now he wants to meet the readers again, to continue his basic education. Hence his first petition: May God the Father and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. Paul's second petition is that the Thessalonians may overflow in love, not only for each other but also for all people. Christian love consists of two concentric circles (Gl 6:10:1; Th 5:15). His third petition is eschatological in nature, namely that the readers will be holy and blameless at the coming of Jesus with all his 'holy ones' (NIV), that is, the holy angels as his servants in carrying out the final judgement (2 Th 1:7-10).

At the end of the letter, Paul has extended his usual wish: 'may the God of peace be with you' (Rm 15:33; Phil 4:9; cf. Heb 13:20-21). This does not only mean that God will give his peace to the believers. He who is peace himself will, according to this wish, remain with the Thessalonians. In God's personal presence, all readers will experience a heavenly peace. Paul's

extension contains the two major themes addressed earlier in the body of the letter, as Jeffrey Weima has shown. He articulates these themes as the call to holy/sanctified living and comfort concerning Christ's return (Weima 2014, pp. 418–421). At the centre of this peace benediction is the activity of God himself with regard to the readers. They were called by him; he will also complete his work in their lives – totally and integrally [όλοτελεῖς, καὶ όλόκληρον].

The triad of 'spirit, soul and body' could be interpreted as a description of the human person in its totality. But if one tries to explain the pre-positioned addition of 'spirit' to the more common pair 'soul and body', the term 'spirit' [πνεῦμα] could replace the philosophical concept of 'reason' [νοῦς] as the governing principle of any individual. It is the Christian spirituality, then, which encompasses and gives direction to the life of the believer (Van Houwelingen 2011b, pp. 164–167, referring to Eph 4:23).

## □ 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12

'To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.'

## □ 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

'Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.'

## □ 2 Thessalonians 3:5

'May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.'

## □ 2 Thessalonians 3:16

'Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.'

According to 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12, Paul constantly prays that God might bring to fruition all the good, faith-prompted intentions and deeds of the Thessalonians. His praying has a two-part goal: not only the glorification of the Lord Jesus, but also the glorification of the readers. Carson remarks: '[...] we become increasingly transformed to the likeness of Christ, in anticipation of the climactic glorification at the end' (Carson 1992, p. 59, referring to 2 Cor 3:18).

Paul is also praying that the Thessalonians will receive two eschatological gifts from the Lord and from God. Christ is clearly the acting person in 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17. His first gift is ‘eternal consolation’, that is, encouragement from the God of all consolation (Rm 15:5; 2 Cor 1:3–4). His second gift is ‘good hope’. Because this phrase occurs nowhere else in the Bible, Paul could have borrowed a contemporary secular idiomatic expression. Inscriptions from the Hellenistic period use this phrase for the expectation of life after death, and this may also be the intended meaning here (Weima 2014, p. 562; cf. 1 Th 4:17; 5:10). Whatever good things the Thessalonians may wish to do and say, it is Paul’s prayer that they will receive a powerful impetus from Heaven: comfort and strength in their hearts.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:5, Paul prays for the readers also to have the right orientation of their hearts (cf. 1 Chr 29:18–19), and thus also of their Christian life. The divine protector of the Thessalonians will guide them in the right direction. That is to say: direct them towards God and Christ, in love and in perseverance.

Commentaries differ about the interpretation of the genitives ‘of God’ and ‘of Christ’. Is it Paul’s prayer that the readers will have love for God and a perseverant expectation of Christ (objective genitive)? Or does the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ function as examples for the readers (subjective genitive)? There is a third possibility, however, taking the genitive in a qualitative sense. Paul’s prayer could then be paraphrased as follows: ‘May the Lord turn your hearts to the same love as God’s and to the same endurance as Christ’s’.

The Lord of peace in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 is again Christ (Weima 2014, pp. 633–634). Seated at God’s right hand, the exalted Jesus distributes a heavenly peace which will be fully manifested on Earth at the end of time. This peace is dispensed ‘always and in all ways’ [διὰ παντός ἐν παντί τρόπῳ]. From Heaven, the Lord of peace has an unlimited reach. Through a subtle play on words, this prayer-wish of Paul is linked to the immediately following letter closing: ‘May the Lord be with you all’ [ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν]. There is probably also a link between this closing prayer for peace in 2 Thessalonians and the peace that was wished for in the opening of both Thessalonian letters (Van Houwelingen 2011b, p. 234).

## ■ For individuals from the Pauline circle

### □ 2 Timothy 1:3–4

‘I am grateful to God [...] when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.’

The tears of Timothy were probably farewell tears, but at which occasion it is not known. Was it Paul's arrest by the Roman authorities? Was it the moment that he was transported to Rome? In each case, the painful memory of their parting, without any guarantee of meeting again, is still fresh in Paul's mind and prompts him to pray persistently in his imprisonment. Although he does not specify the content of his praying, his longing to see Timothy again is unmistakable. This would be a Godsend (the passive verbal form *πληρωθῶ* implies God to be the subject). Let Timothy, his 'beloved child', not be ashamed of an imprisoned apostle, but take an example from Onesiphorus, who did not hesitate to visit him in Rome (2 Tm 1:16-18). Paul's implicit desire is already clear from his opening prayer. At the end of this letter, he will explicitly request that Timothy visit him as soon as possible (2 Tm 4:9, 21).

## □ Philemon 1:4-6

'When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God [...] I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ.'

Paul's prayer for his 'brother' Philemon has several exegetical uncertainties. See the commentaries on Verse 6 for details. We follow Douglas Moo (2008), who considers the most plausible interpretation to be that Paul prays that Philemon's fellowship with other believers, based on faith, might be effective. He (Moo 2008) paraphrases:

Philemon, I am praying that the mutual participation that arises from your faith in Christ might become effective in leading you to understand and put into practice all the good that God wills for us and that is found in our community; and do all this for the sake of Christ. (p. 394)

This interpretation is in accordance with the next verse, where the apostle remembers the joy and encouragement that he had received from Philemon, because many believers had been refreshed through him. Paul is still speaking in general terms here, but in Verse 17 he will make his intention clear: The faith that unites them needs to become visible in accepting Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave. Paul leaves it deliberately up to Philemon what he should actually do: set Onesimus free or not (Mulder 2022).

## ■ Evaluation

Many texts belong to the category of intercessions made for the readers. Through his prayers, Paul articulates his strong connection with the churches - see also the expression *μνηϊαν ποιέω* [remember] (Rm 1:9; Eph 1:16; Phlm 4; cf. 2 Tm 1:4).

Looking at the cross-links between these texts, it is striking how multicoloured the prayer content is. Paul's intercession covers all areas of Christian community life. He prays for spiritual growth (Rm 15:13; Eph 3:16, 19; Phil 1:10-11; 1 Th 3:13; 5:23; 2 Th 1:11; 2:17; 3:5) that goes along with an understanding of God's will and promises (Eph 1:16-19; Phil 1:9-10; Col 1:9-10). This cannot be separated from his prayer for a Christian attitude (2 Cor 13:7; Col 1:10; 2 Th 1:11; 2:17), which also consists of continually seeking loving harmony among the members of the congregation (Rm 15:5-6; Eph 3:17; 1 Th 3:12). Furthermore, Paul prays for the peace of Christ (Rm 15:13; 2 Th 3:16) and also, very practical, that God may grant him to visit his brothers and sisters again (Rm 1:10; 1 Th 3:10).

Some additional notions are with a remarkable frequency present in the formulation of the prayer itself or in its immediate context: hope and eschaton (Rm 15:13; Eph 1:18; Phil 1:10; 1 Th 3:13; 5:23; 2 Th 1:10; 2:16), faith (Rm 1:8; 15:13; 2 Cor 13:5; Eph 1:15, 19; 1 Th 3:10; 2 Th 1:11; 2 Tm 1:4; Phlm 5, 6), the community of saints (Eph 1:15, 18; Col 1:12; 2 Th 1:10; Phlm 5), love (Eph 3:17; Phil 1:9; 1 Th 3:12; 2 Th 3:5; Phlm 5, 7), and power (Rm 15:13; Eph 1:19; Col 1:11; 2 Th 1:11).

## ■ Intercessions requested from the readers

On several occasions, one does not find Paul praying for the recipients of his letter but, conversely, asking *them* to pray for him (Rm 15):

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. (vv. 30-32)

Paul's appeal to the Romans shows urgency (cf. Rm 12:1). He wants to be supported in his ministry by their joining in his prayer. Therefore, he requests prayer for his apostolic service to the Christian Jewish people in Jerusalem. 'The logic of the appeal runs something like this: "If you truly confess Jesus the Messiah as Lord, I urge you in his name to pray for me"' (Carson 1992, p. 209). To be rescued 'from the disobedients' [ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπειθοῦντων] in Judea means that Paul faced opposition from Jewish people who still refused to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel. He had learned by repeated experience that some of those Jewish people wanted to kill him (Ac 14:9; 21:27-36; 23:12; 25:3).

While Paul prepares to travel to Jerusalem, the very heart of religious Judaism, he realises that this would put him in grave danger. First of all, then, Paul asks the Roman Christians to pray that his life will be spared so that he will return to them safe and sound. Next to that, Paul wants his ministry to be acceptable to the Jewish Christians. He is bringing money



from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to help poor believers in Jerusalem. If they would receive him in a friendly way, 'there will not only be thanks to God but also a rich infusion of a spirit of unity in the church scattered throughout the Roman Empire and beyond' (Carson 1992, p. 216). Lastly, being 'refreshed' in Rome also reflects his hope that he would obtain some support to help him on his way to Spain, where he wanted to extend his ministry.

## □ Ephesians 6:19–20

'Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.'

Paul's prayer request from the Ephesians concerns boldness. Whenever he speaks, words may be given to him. The mystery of the gospel had been revealed to him: Gentile believers are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus (Eph 3:1–6). Paul also wants the readers to pray that he may declare it without fear at the moment of speaking.

With *παρρησία* and *παρρησιάσωμαι*, the same freedom of speech is indicated that is thematic in the NT, particularly in the book of Acts (see Van Unnik 1962). It would fit the situation of Paul during his house arrest in his own hired dwelling in Rome, according to Acts 28, where he had the possibility to proclaim the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ 'with all boldness and without hindrance' (Ac 28:20). Paradoxically, Paul is a chained ambassador. The apostle also knew that he could be called to testify before the Roman emperor, to whom he had appealed (a 'divine must'; Ac 23:11; 27:24; Hoehner 2002, p. 865). In that case, he would need freedom of speech more than ever. Paul asks the Ephesians to support him and his apostolic witness with their intercessional prayers.

## □ Philippians 1:19

'For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.'

Paul wants the Philippians to pray for him because he is actually a prisoner in chains. He knows that God will help him 'through your prayers, and with that, God's special provision of the Spirit' (the Greek grammar assumes the closest kind of relationship between their prayers and the supply of the Spirit; Fee 1995, p. 132). He expects that what has happened to him will turn out for his deliverance. Paul's imprisonment had already served to advance the gospel (Phil 1:12–14). But he also longs for

‘deliverance’ [σωτηρία] (cf. Job 13:16 LXX). In Philippians 1:20–26, Paul explains that he is torn between his desire to be with Christ and his duty in view of the readers to remain alive. In both cases, there will be a kind of ‘deliverance’, but Paul concludes that being freed from his shackles and staying with the Philippians would be preferable.<sup>142</sup> Eventually, this is what he asks them to pray for. Paul himself hopes *not at all* to be ashamed, but to have *all* freedom of speech in case he would be summoned to appear in court (note the strong contrast in v. 20: ἐν οὐδενὶ αἰσχυνθήσομαι ἀλλ’ ἐν πάσῃ παρρησίᾳ).

## □ Colossians 4:3–4

‘At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.’

At the moment of writing to the Colossians, Paul is imprisoned because of what he calls the mystery of Christ, probably shorthand for ‘God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself’, as he wrote earlier in the letter (Col 2:2). Paul does not specifically ask his readers to pray for the door of his prison cell to be opened. Rather, he thinks of an open door for the Word. His prayer request does not concern his personal freedom but rather that the gospel could reach more people, just as it had reached the Colossians by this prison letter. According to the NT, an open door is a golden opportunity for evangelistic ministry (Ac 14:27; 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12; Rv 3:8, 20).

Moo (2008) sketches the flow of thought in this passage as follows:

Paul’s general reference to the proclamation of the mystery (note the “we”) is filled out more specifically in his concern that he might himself, in his imprisonment (v. 3b), continue boldly and clearly to proclaim the gospel. (p. 325)

It could be added that Paul was, precisely for this reason, prepared to accept suffering for the sake of Christ (Ac 9:16; Col 1:24). The phrase ‘as I should’, then, refers to the divine command to bear witness, even if it would cost him his life.

## □ 1 Thessalonians 5:24–25

‘The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. Beloved, pray for us.’

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142. See the detailed discussion in Silva (2005, pp. 69–71). Perhaps there is a deliberate ambiguity in Paul’s use of the term σωτηρία here.

## □ 2 Thessalonians 3:1–3a

‘Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all are faithful.’ (translation adjusted by the authors)

The prayer request from 1 Thessalonians 5 is repeated and expanded in 2 Thessalonians 3. By praying for Paul and his companions, the Thessalonian brothers and sisters will be involved in their continuing mission, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also elsewhere in the world. The thought seems to reflect Psalm 147:15: ‘He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly’. The readers need to pray that the gospel itself will be like a herald, sent out to spread his message far and wide, and to report later to his sender.

How will this message be received by people? The Thessalonians themselves had warmly welcomed the gospel (1 Th 1:6–8; 2 Th 2:13). Now they have to pray that the Word will be glorified everywhere in the same way as they did (2 Th 1:12). Nevertheless, the apostolic preaching would meet with great opposition, just as in Thessalonica. Hence the proposed petition to be rescued from wicked and evil people. This does not mean that all unbelievers are perceived here as wicked and evil. Paul has the opponents of the Word in view. He asks his readers for intercessory prayers in order to be freed of all adversaries and enemies who hinder his apostolic work. Behind all evilness of people is the Evil One in person. However, both the missionaries and the Thessalonians may trust the Lord, who is faithful and will do what he has promised: keeping them sound and blameless at the Parousia (v. 3b reflects 1 Th 5:23; see the earlier section titled ‘For the Thessalonians’).

## ■ Evaluation

This category is less multifaceted than the previous one. It contains fewer texts and the content of Paul’s requested prayer is fairly unambiguous: support for his ministry. Thus he asks the Thessalonians to pray that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified (2 Th 3:1), the Colossians that God will open to him a door for the Word (Col 4:3–4) and the Ephesians to pray for boldness in preaching the gospel (Eph 6:19–20). But very practical support for his ministry can also be in view (Rm 15:32), or safeguarding from hostilities (Rm 15:31; 2 Th 3:2).

## ■ Petitions for others

### □ Romans 10:1

‘Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.’

In his letter to the Romans, Paul deals extensively with his fellow Jewish people who still do not consider Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. The ‘desire’ [ἐὐδοκία] (cf. 2 Th 1:11) of his heart and his prayer on behalf of Israel is that God’s people would experience salvation. Paul’s emotional words evoke Romans 9:1–3 and are a prelude to Romans 11:25–26 on the salvation of ‘all Israel’: the people of Israel as a whole (Bachmann 2002). It was Paul’s confident expectation, caused by the ongoing mass conversion of pagans in his mission to the Gentiles, that Israel would become jealous. His hope for Israel has more a redemption-historical than an eschatological framework (Van Houwelingen 2011a). Israel’s salvation is not self-evident, however, for Paul has wholeheartedly decided to pray that God will realise his promises and have mercy (cf. Gl 6:16; Eastman 2010). On the other hand, Jewish people have also their covenantal responsibility towards God, who sent his only begotten son. Israel may only be saved by confessing that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel.

## □ 2 Corinthians 9:13–15

‘[...] while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!’

During his mission to the Gentiles, Paul organised in Macedonia and Achaia a collection for the poor in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 8–9, he unfolds a theological argument for this collection. The text of 2 Corinthians 9:13–15 contains two aspects. Firstly, the focus is on the response of the recipients of the collection in relation to God. Secondly, Verse 14 focuses on the response of the believers in Jerusalem as beneficiaries of the believers in Corinth as donors. The collection shows God’s surpassing grace at work among the Gentile Corinthians in Achaia (and, earlier, the Macedonians) to no less an extent than among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. The phrase αὐτῶν δεήσει may be part of a genitive absolute clause, δεήσει being a dative expressing means (‘by praying’), location (‘in their prayer’) or attendant circumstances (‘as they pray’). Harris (2005) argues for the last option, translating: ‘And as they pray for you they will yearn for you’. He (Harris 2005) comments:

The recipient of a gift naturally longs to meet the donor, express gratitude in person, and forge a personal relationship. After receiving the gift from Gentile believers, Christians in Jerusalem would long to thank them in person and to verify and applaud in person the evidence of God’s grace in their lives. (pp. 656–657)

## □ Galatians 6:16

‘And for as many as will walk in line with this rule, peace be upon them. And mercy be even upon the Israel of God’ (translation by Eastman 2010, p. 373).

Galatians 6 contains an intriguing wish for peace and mercy, which was thoroughly studied by Susan Eastman, in relation to Romans 9–11 (Eastman 2010). She shows that nowhere else in the Pauline Letters is ‘mercy’ included in either an opening blessing or a closing benediction; that nowhere does Israel refer to anyone but Jewish people; and that nowhere else does phrase ‘the Israel of God’ occur. She disputes the usual view that ‘the Israel of God’ is Paul’s circumlocution for the church. We follow Eastman in her explanation of this exceptional Pauline wish.

According to Eastman, in Galatians 2:6–7, Paul distinguished between Jewish people and Gentiles outside the Christian community. With an ongoing apostolic mission to the Jewish people in view, Galatians 6:16 invokes peace on all (Christians, both of Jewish and Gentile origins) who walk in line with the rule of the new creation, in which there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision. A fervent wish is added for God’s saving mercy on his people Israel, who had not yet accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Paul’s prayer includes hope for the success of his mission to the Jewish people. Thus, the wish for Israel in Galatians 6 is consistent with Paul’s expectation for Israel in Romans 9–11 (see also Bachmann 2010; Barclay 2015, pp. 420–421; Van Houwelingen 2011a).

## □ Ephesians 6:18b

‘Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.’

According to Paul, all believers are involved in the struggle against evil powers (‘all the saints’; Eph 1:15; 3:18). That they are called ‘saints’ here, more than elsewhere in the Pauline literature, seems to be related to the emphasis on holiness in the letter to the Ephesians (Trebilco 2012, p. 147). Not only is the prayer of each individual believer needed, the struggle is also a common task. According to Paul, in this spiritual battle there should be mutual concern for one another, demonstrated by prayer for each other (Hoehner 2002, p. 859). Vigilance and perseverance are required to be prepared for an enemy attack, anywhere and anytime. While continuously praying, the worldwide ‘community of saints’ will stand firm in the combat against evil forces.

## □ 1 Timothy 2:1–2

‘I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.’

In his pastoral instructions to Timothy, Paul makes it clear that the Christian congregation has to be a praying church. He envisions a faith community that constantly sends a whole range of prayers to Heaven and thus wants to dedicate all people to their Creator.

Paul uses, asyndetically, four different terms to indicate what a praying congregation has to do: ‘supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings’ [δέησεις προσευχὰς ἐντεύξεις εὐχαριστίας] (see also 1 Tm 5:5). The congregation should not only pursue its own interests; its prayer must also have an outward focus.

This prayer request is concretised as praying on behalf of kings and all who are in high positions. Governmental figures used to represent the society. Because their authority comes from above, it deserves respect and also prayer (Rm 13:1-7; 1 Pt 2:13). ‘Kings’ here refers to the Roman emperor together with his vassal princes. The other dignitaries in view may then be various administrators, both at a regional and a local level. By praying for all people, especially those in authority, the whole society is sustained. Paul follows here the prayer tradition of Judaism since the Babylonian Exile (Jr 29:7; Bar 1:11-12; Ez 6:10).

The effect – not the content – of their prayer is that Christians lead a quiet and peaceful life (1 Th 4:11; 2 Th 3:12). The apostle does not want believers to ask God for an undisturbed life. Rather, while praying, the congregation submits itself to the government (Tt 3:1) and thus finds itself involved in society. She prays for the salvation of a world of which it is a part. Living in godliness (εὐσεβεία, similar to the Latin word *pietas*) – in accordance with the divine order and respecting hierarchical relationships – was seen in the Roman Empire as the foundation of a stable society. Dignity (σεμνότης; 1 Tm 3:4; Tt 2:7) characterises a lifestyle that commands respect from everyone. By using these two terms, the apostle Christianises traditional values (Klinker-De Klerck 2013).

## □ 2 Timothy 1:16-18

‘May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain; when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me – may the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day!’

In order to encourage Timothy to visit him in his Roman custody, Paul mentions the example of Onesiphorus, who had been helpful, courageous and diligent in searching for Paul in Rome. The testimony about Onesiphorus is surrounded by a repeated petition (vv. 16a, 18a). Paul expressly asks the Lord to have mercy, first of all on the household of Onesiphorus and then on Onesiphorus himself. The apocryphal *Acts of Paul [and Thecla]* tell that Onesiphorus was married and had children. It is said that the family lived in Iconium and that they received Paul and his travelling companions hospitably in their house.

Why, then, is Onesiphorus not mentioned together with his household but separately and only in the second instance? The most obvious explanation, though not accepted by all commentators, is that he had already passed away. Paul’s grateful testimony about Onesiphorus

has something of an 'in memoriam'. Did he have to pay for his devotion in turbulent Rome with his death? The text gives some clues that point in this direction (Mounce 2000, p. 495; Van Houwelingen 2012, pp. 177-179).

If Onesiphorus had died, should Paul's plea for divine mercy be understood as a prayer for the deceased, as Roman Catholics used to do? But Paul asks this for Onesiphorus' grieving household as well as for the deceased. It follows that life or death makes no difference when believers are dedicated to the mercy of the Lord Jesus, who said: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy' (Mt 5:5; cf. Mt 25:36). At the last judgement, bad deeds will be justly retributed, whereas good deeds will be mercifully rewarded (cf. Js 2:13). So, Paul confidently entrusts Onesiphorus to divine mercy on the day of resurrection.

Seeking and finding divine mercy is a familiar theme in the Old Testament (OT). Presumably, two similar expressions - 'May the Lord give him to find mercy' and 'May he find mercy with the Lord' - have been fused here to: 'May the Lord grant him that he may find mercy from the Lord'. In the first instance, the Lord (with an article) seems to be Jesus Christ. The second time (without an article) may concern the name of God, YHWH, which the Septuagint renders with κύριος. Therefore, the secret of divine mercy, to which Onesiphorus is entrusted by means of Paul's intercession, is Jesus Christ. *Kyrie eleison!*

## ■ Evaluation

The many Pauline petitions for or from others reveal a web of socio-religious and political relationships involving - as shown - both insiders and outsiders of the Christian community.

Paul himself prays for mercy for his fellow Jewish people (outsiders: Rm 10:1; Gl 6:16) and for peace for his fellow Christians (insiders: Gl 6:16). Sometimes he prays for individual Christians as well (2 Tm 1:16-18).

The Christians among themselves are also called upon to pray for one another *and* for outsiders. The Jerusalem church is gratefully connected to the Corinthian church through its prayer (2 Cor 9:14). The Ephesians have to pray for all the saints (Eph 6:18b). Paul demands intercessory prayers for outsiders as well: for persons in high positions, representing society, but also for the salvation of *all* people (1 Tm 2:1-2).

Prayers apparently function as a binding agent, strengthening the Christian community and reinforcing its outward focus. Even stronger, praying for outsiders is an integral part of the mission of Christians.

## ■ General calls to (continuous) prayer

The apostle Paul was devoted to prayer all the time, whether it was day or night (Rm 15:30; Col 1:9; 2 Tm 1:3-4). We will discuss now the texts in which he urges his readers also to pray continuously.

## □ Philippians 4:5b-7

‘The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.’

The Philippians had reason enough to worry. They found themselves in the midst of an environment that was not particularly Christian-friendly and, moreover, they had to deal with opponents (Phil 1:27-30; 3:2). Paul calls for ‘holy unconcern’ (Floor 2013, p. 170). To be anxious in nothing [μηδέν] is the reverse of turning to God in everything [ἐν παντί] by means of praying.

With regard to God’s response, Paul assures his readers of divine peace, unimaginable in possibilities and independent of all circumstances (see Van Houwelingen 2015, p. 5; Col 3:15). The Philippians will be guarded because Christ Jesus surrounds them with his peace-keeping force, just like their town was guarded by the Roman garrison in order to guarantee the Pax Romana.

Paul uses four terms to recommend to his readers a rich prayer life. The main term, the objective in the Greek sentence, is τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν [your wishes]: prayers in which requests are made. This happens in the context of prayer in general [προσευχή] and petition [δέησις], which can be taken as hendiadys: ‘supplicating prayer’. Noteworthy, the praying of the readers has to be accompanied by thanksgiving [εὐχαριστία]: human gratitude that acknowledges God’s generosity. His χάρις is the Christ-gift.

In retrospect to this passage, Gordon Fee comments that joy, prayer, thanksgiving and peace identify Pauline spirituality. The key lies with the indicative, ‘the Lord is near’ – now and to come. The Lord is now present by his Spirit, who prompts prayer and thanksgiving, among whose ‘fruit’ are joy and peace. Fee adds that, according to Paul, ‘the Lord is near’ in the eschatological sense as well. This means that the vindication of the Philippians is close at hand (Fee 1995, p. 412).

## □ Ephesians 6:18a

‘Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.’

After his exhortation to put on the armour of God (Eph 6:10-17), Paul encourages the Ephesians to pray at all times. Praying ‘in the Spirit’, which seems to function as their secret weapon, means praying with divine help. It is the Holy Spirit who assists the readers, in order that they will resist the evil powers, praying for the right things in the right way (Jude 1:20). Again, προσευχή and δέησις may be taken as hendiadys: pray in all kinds of supplication prayer. This general exhortation to prayer is followed by a particular request to pray for ‘all the saints’ and for Paul himself (see our



comment on Eph 6:18b in the earlier section titled ‘Petitions for others’). The adjective *πᾶς* is mentioned four times in Verse 18. Believers should pray at every opportunity, through every prayer and petition, with *all* persistence and petition for *all* the saints. In this way, Paul makes clear that prayer is of vital importance in the spiritual battle (Hoehner 2002, p. 859).

## □ Colossians 4:2

‘Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.’

The Colossians have to persevere in the prayer practice they had been taught when they became Christians; that will keep them awake and alert. Praying needs both perseverance and vigilance (Ac 2:42; 6:4; Rm 12:12; see Eph 6:18b). See for the link with thanksgiving the earlier discussion of Philippians 4:4–7. In Colossians 4, persistent prayer might have the sense of petitionary prayer, because the general exhortation in Verse 2 is followed by a specific prayer request for Paul and Timothy in Verse 3. Paul urges the Colossians to make prayer ‘a standard feature of the Christian life’ (Moo 2008, pp. 319–320).

## □ 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

‘Rejoice always,  
pray without ceasing,  
give thanks in all circumstances;’

How should the Thessalonians give expression to their faith? God wants them to live in joy, prayer and thanksgiving, according to the succinct Pauline instruction above. Prayer is sandwiched here between joy ‘at all times’ and thanksgiving ‘in everything’. Paul seems to focus more on the expression than on the experience of faith. Perhaps his directives address, in particular, the congregational worship of the Thessalonians (Weima 2014, p. 398).

Christian joy makes people independent of circumstances because it is generated by the nearness of Jesus Christ and strengthened by the power of his Spirit. Paul and Silas had experienced this themselves during their imprisonment in Philippi. About midnight they were expressing their joy in the Lord by praying and singing hymns (Ac 16:25). Their example had been followed by the Thessalonians when they, in spite of heavy pressure, accepted the proclaimed gospel with a joy that came from the Holy Spirit (1 Th 1:5–6). Prayer, too, should not be limited to fixed times, but should be done unceasingly (the rare adverb *ἀδιαλείπτως* [uninterruptedly] recalls 1 Th 1:2; 2:13). Similarly, thanksgiving is required in all circumstances. The prayer of the Thessalonians may not cease.

## ■ Evaluation

This category includes only a few texts, which characterise the continuous praying of Christians in a similar way: persistent and vigilant (Eph 6:18a; Col 4:2), accompanied by joy and thanksgiving (Phil 4:6; Col 4:2; 1 Th 5:16, 18). The Lord, Jesus Christ, is always near to them. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians should live their lives prayerfully.

## ■ Closing benedictions

The Pauline Epistle's closings are carefully studied by Weima. In this section, we are building on his research. The most common epistolary convention of a Pauline Letter closing is what he calls the 'grace benediction'. This is also the most consistent of Paul's closing conventions, containing three basic elements: (1) the wish, (2) the divine source and (3) the recipients (Weima 1994, pp. 78–87):

1. In every Pauline Letter, the wish of the grace benediction is articulated by Ἡ χάρις in the nominative case. It is usually translated by 'the grace', but John Barclay has convincingly argued that 'the gift' would be, in most cases, a more appropriate translation. Whereas people in antiquity believed that divine gifts are good precisely by being given lavishly but discriminately to fitting people, the apostle Paul declares that the gift of Christ – or 'Christ-gift' – is completely different: it bears no relation to human worth (Barclay 2015).

Only at the closing of 2 Corinthians does Paul formulate two supplementary wishes: next to the gift of Christ, he mentions the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The apostle seems to have a specific reason for doing so in this letter because the Corinthian community was characterised by animosity and party-spirit. Paul wishes his grace benediction to include those whom he had censured at an earlier stage in the letter. The expanded conclusion is to be understood as a 'conciliatory gesture' (Thrall 2000, p. 920). In an embryonic Trinitarian formulation, one finds the order Christ-God-Spirit. This order is not astonishing, given the Christological focus of Paul. He does not describe relationships within the Trinity but in the chronological order of the Christian experience: believers firstly come to Jesus Christ and so encounter God before then receiving the Holy Spirit (Harris 2005, p. 938).

2. The divine source of the grace benediction is expressed by means of a genitive phrase in Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1–2 Thessalonians and Philemon: τοῦ κυρίου [ἡμῶν] Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ]. It is formally absent but still implied in Ephesians and Colossians (letters that are similar in content), as well as in 1–2 Timothy and Titus (letters addressed to Paul's co-workers). The genitive is used in a subjective

sense, while at the same time an objective sense could be present: ‘the gift that [our] Lord Jesus [Christ] *embodies and gives*’. In the Pauline Letter-openings, the source of the divine gift is primarily ‘God our Father’ but inseparably linked to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only Romans 15:33 but also Romans 16:20 contains the phrase ‘the God of peace’. Possibly, the apostle Paul himself has coined this unusual expression (Van Houwelingen 2015, p. 4).

3. Indicating the recipients of the grace benediction, Paul always uses μετὰ ὑμῶν [‘with you’, plural] in Galatians, Philippians and Philemon, expanded to ‘μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν’ [with your spirit]. This is a way of emphasising that it is Paul’s wish that the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ will be with each one of his readers, head by head. Sometimes the adjective πάντων has been added: μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν [with all of you] (Rm 15:33; 2 Cor 13:13; 2 Th 3:18). This addition has an emphatic function, including even those recipients whom Paul rebuked earlier in the letter.<sup>143</sup>

In contrast, the Byzantine manuscript tradition and the Western text read the singular μετὰ σου in 1 Timothy 6:21b. Even if one follows the NA edition in reading the second-person plural, which is not used anywhere else in this letter, Timothy remains in the closing verses (vv. 20–21) the addressed person (see also Reed 1993, p. 99). The manuscript tradition is unanimous with regard to 2 Timothy 4:22, where the letter closing clearly consists of two parts. The first wish, in the singular, is intended for Timothy himself (‘The Lord be with your spirit’), while the second wish, in the plural, addresses a wider circle of recipients (‘The gift be with you’).

Another distinctive feature of Pauline Letter recipients is found when Galatians 6:18 adds the vocative ἀδελφοί [brothers and sisters]. This entitlement seems to be meant to reassure the apostle’s readers in Galatia of his continued love and concern for them, after his rather severe argument; it appeared at strategic places earlier throughout the letter, as Weima shows.

## ■ Wish for spiritual welfare

From other petitions in the Pauline Letters, one can deduce that a verb in the optative mood may be supplemented in the grace benediction (see Rm 15:5–6; 15:13; 1 Th 3:11; 3:12–13; 5:23; 2 Th 2:16–17; 3:5; 3:16). The opening benedictions of 1–2 Peter and Jude also have an optative. In the case of Paul’s grace benedictions, the optative εἴη could be supplemented.

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143. The repetition of ‘all’ in 2 Thessalonians 3:16–18 argues in favour of reading these three verses together as Paul’s own handwritten greeting (Van Houwelingen 2011b, p. 238).

The force of this mood in the NT is often similar to that of the imperative. Hence, Bastiaan Van Elderen speaks of an ‘imperatival optative’: ‘The speaker intends more than a wish (“may it be so-and-so”); he expresses this with a strong confidence of fulfilment (“let it be so-and-so”)’. Paul confidently expects that his wish will be received and realised in the lives of his readers (Van Elderen 1967).

Paul changed the rather simple farewell wish of ancient letters to the more elaborate wish for the gift of Jesus Christ to be with his readers. Weima explains that the farewell wishes at the end of the first-century CE expressed not only a simple or civil goodbye but also concern for the physical welfare of the letter recipient(s). Paul’s pastoral interests prompted him to express concern for the spiritual welfare of his reader(s). Moreover, by mentioning the Christ-gift at the end of the letter, the apostle was able to construct an *inclusio* with the opening salutation: ‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’.

## ■ Evaluation

The closing benedictions, together with the opening formula, form a prayerful frame for the letters in which Paul wishes the recipients the most precious thing: the Christ-gift. It is the apostle’s strong wish for their spiritual welfare.

## ■ Conclusion

A distinct feature of Paul’s intercession and petition prayers is that they are fully embedded in the apostle’s pastoral and missionary activity (cf. Crump 2006, pp. 225–229). Both the ingroup and the outgroup are in the picture.

With regard to the ingroup, the frequent intercession and petition underline the enduring relationship between the apostle himself and the recipients of his letters. Furthermore, Christians are called to pray *for* but also *together with* the saints: this is how the worldwide faith community functions. There is also a strong connection between material/diaconal support and prayer.

Concerning the outgroup, Christians should pray for all people, especially for government officials. By doing so, they show that the wider society is important to them. To pray, in that sense, strengthens the outward focus of the church. Moreover, prayer for outsiders is an integral part of the Christian mission.

On a theological level, Jesus Christ is the focal point of Paul’s praying. The fact that all his letters end with a closing benediction shows how the Christ-gift is of vital importance. The best he can give his brothers and

sisters is this strong wish for spiritual welfare. He prays the same for Israel. His prayer for mercy is based on the unrepentance of God's promises, of which Jesus the Messiah is the secret.

Paul also calls upon the congregations to continuous and persistent prayer. There can be different kinds of prayers; in any case, one should pray 'in the Spirit'. For Paul, prayers are part of Christian spirituality. At the same time, Paul prays emphatically for the spiritual growth of his congregations: that Christ may dwell in their hearts, that through an ever-deepening knowledge of God and his promises they may become strong, filled with comfort, joy, peace, hope, righteousness, love, steadfastness and holiness. He prays that they may become blameless, sanctified and worthy of their calling. Clearly this spiritual growth cannot be separated from growing sanctification, an actual focus to do good, bearing fruit for Christ.

The notion of growth points to the eschatological dimension in which prayer has its place: prayers here and now reveal the Christians' longing for an ultimate completion at the return of Jesus Christ. In the hopeful expectation of that moment, it is the Spirit of Christ himself, who comes to their aid, also in the imperfection of their prayer (Rm 8):

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (vv. 26-27)

# Praying with boldness and reverence: Prayer in the book of Hebrews

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## ■ Introduction

While there is an abundance of studies on the enigmatic reference to the prayer of Jesus in Hebrews 5:7–8, not many studies have been published on prayer in Hebrews as a whole. Only two publications on prayer in Hebrews were found: the brief article of Shillito (1914, pp. 543–546) in *The Expository Times*, and the more recent chapter of Filtvedt (2014, pp. 161–182), in which he reflects on what it means to pray as a follower of Jesus according to Hebrews, especially how Jesus functions as an example to be followed. The lack of studies on prayer in Hebrews calls for further investigation.

Investigating prayer in Hebrews, however, is not a straightforward exercise. Shillito (1914, p. 543) fittingly captures the problem: when investigating prayer in Hebrews, '[t]he concordance will not carry us all the way'. In order to assist the current investigation, the chapter starts by giving an overview of possible prayer-related words and concepts employed

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in Hebrews, determining which passages in Hebrews should be investigated in more detail in the rest of the chapter. The next two sections of the chapter, respectively, investigate the prayers of Jesus in Hebrews and the prayers of the author and addressees. This forms the bulk of the investigation. Putting everything together, the chapter turns to a discussion of prayer in Hebrews as a whole, focusing on the book's unique perspectives on and theological contribution to prayer. As part of the 'Reformed Theology in Africa Book Series', this chapter concludes by briefly reflecting on some of the implications of these findings for the church in Africa.

## ■ An overview of possible prayer-related words and concepts in Hebrews

Hebrews contains a number of words that can be considered prayer-related words in light of the rest of the New Testament (NT) and early Christian writings. Some of the words the author employs are quite common, while others are unique. In addition, various cultic terms are found dispersed throughout the book that may relate to prayer in some way. In what follows, an overview of possible prayer-related words and concepts employed in Hebrews is given in the order in which they appear in the book. This section serves to determine which passages in Hebrews should be investigated in more detail in the rest of the chapter.

### ■ προσκυνέω

The verb προσκυνέω refers to the action of prostrating oneself before important people or deities. The verb can be translated as '(fall down and) worship', 'prostrate oneself before' or 'welcoming respectfully' (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 882; cf. Louw & Nida 1996, §17.21). As such, the verb can refer to an action accompanying prayer, namely falling down in respect and worship.

While the verb can be used to refer to respect shown to earthly rulers or important people, the only two occurrences of the verb in Hebrews (1:6; 11:21) refer to worshipping Christ or God. In Hebrews 1:6, the author quotes the words of Deuteronomy 32:43 (LXX) in such a way as to indicate that angels (should) 'worship' the Son. In Hebrews 11:21, the author alludes to Genesis 47:31, which states that Jacob 'bowed in worship over the top of his staff'.

### ■ παρακαλέω

Hebrews contains four occurrences of the verb παρακαλέω (Heb 3:13; 10:25; 13:19, 22). While the verb has a number of possible meanings, those that link to prayer are usages where the verb has the meaning of to 'call upon for help', 'appeal' or 'request' (cf. Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 764-765).

In Hebrews, however, the verb *παρακαλέω* is never used to refer to anyone appealing to God. Rather, the verb is only used in a horizontal sense: the author calls on the addressees to ‘exhort’ or to ‘encourage’ one another to persevere in their faith commitment (Heb 3:13; 10:25), and the author exhorts the addressees to pray for him (Heb 13:19) and to accept his ‘word of exhortation’ (Heb 13:22). The use of *παρακαλέω* in Hebrews 13:19 calls for further investigation, as it is explicitly linked to prayer.

## ■ προσέρχομαι

The verb *προσέρχομαι* generally refers to movement towards something or someone. It can either refer to physical movement in the sense of ‘come to’ or ‘approach’, or to approaching or entering a deity’s presence (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 878; cf. Liddell et al. 1996, p. 1511; Louw & Nida 1996, §15.77).

Hebrews contains seven occurrences of the verb *προσέρχομαι* (Heb 4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:18, 22). Strikingly, all seven of them refer to approaching God in a cultic sense (Schneider 1964, p. 684). The second major division of Hebrews (Heb 4:14–10:18) contains the most occurrences of the verb. The author argues that the law cannot make perfect those who ‘approach’ God (Heb 10:1). Christ, on the other hand, is able at all times to save those who ‘approach’ God through him (Heb 7:25). Consequently, the addressees are exhorted to ‘approach’ God ‘with boldness’ (*μετὰ παρρησίας*, Heb 4:16) and ‘full assurance of faith’ (*ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως*, Heb 10:22) through the high priestly ministry of Christ. In a parenthesis in Hebrews 11, the author argues that those who ‘approach’ God must believe that he exists (Heb 11:6). The penultimate chapter of the book refers to the addressees not ‘coming’ to mount Sinai (literally ‘something that can be touched’; Heb 12:18) but ‘coming’ to Mount Zion (Heb 12:22).

Under the new covenant, ‘approaching’ God in a cultic sense would arguably include prayer. For the purposes of this chapter, closer investigation is needed of what it means to ‘approach’ God in Hebrews, especially in the two hortatory passages (Heb 4:16; 10:22).

## ■ προσφέρω

The most basic meaning of the verb *προσφέρω* is to ‘bring’ someone or something to someone (Louw & Nida 1996, §15.192). In this sense, the verb is commonly used to refer to the action of ‘presenting’ or ‘offering’ something to someone (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 886), and it is this nuance that is found in virtually all of the eighteen occurrences of the verb in Hebrews (Heb 5:1, 3, 7; 8:3, 4; 9:7, 9, 14, 25, 28; 10:1, 2, 8, 11, 12; 11:4, 17; 12:7).<sup>144</sup>

144. The only exception is the use of *προσφέρω* in Hebrews 12:7, where the verb refers to the action of ‘dealing with’ or ‘treating’ (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 886; Weiss 1964, p. 66).



While Hebrews has a couple of references to individuals offering something to God (i.e. Abel and Abraham; Heb 11:4, 17), the majority of occurrences of the verb refer to the offerings brought by the Levitical priests and (or in contrast to) the offering brought by Christ. The former continually offered 'gifts', 'sacrifices' or 'blood' to God (Heb 5:1, 3; 8:3, 4; 9:7, 9; 10:1, 2, 11) that 'cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper'. In contrast to the sacrifices and offerings of the old covenant (Heb 10:8 [Ps 40:6]), Christ offered a single sacrifice (Heb 10:12) once-for-all time (Heb 9:25, 28): himself (Heb 9:14). All of these usages make it clear that προσφέρω in Hebrews should be viewed as a cultic term (cf. Weiss 1964, p. 67).<sup>145</sup>

One of the most striking occurrences of προσφέρω in Hebrews is Hebrews 5:7, which states that Jesus 'offered up' prayers and supplications to God in the days of his flesh.

### ■ δέησις

The noun δέησις can be defined as an 'urgent request to meet a need, exclusively addressed to God' (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 213) or 'that which is asked with urgency based on a presumed need' (Louw & Nida 1996, §33.171). It is best translated as 'prayer' or 'plea'. The noun is found once in Hebrews, namely Hebrews 5:7, where it is used to refer to the 'prayers' of Jesus 'in the days of his flesh'.

### ■ ἱκετηρία

Hebrews 5:7 also contains the noun ἱκετηρία, which refers to 'that which is being urgently requested by a suppliant' (Louw & Nida 1996, §33.172), namely 'supplication' (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 473). The noun is employed to refer to the 'supplications' of Jesus in 'the days of his flesh', and once more, the employment of the noun is related to prayer.

### ■ κραυγή

Apart from δέησις and ἱκετηρία, Hebrews 5:7 also contains the noun κραυγή, which refers to a loud cry or shout (Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 565–566; cf. Louw & Nida 1996, §25.138). The 'loud cries' referred to in Hebrews 5:7 refer to those of Jesus 'to the one who was able to save him from death',

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145. Along with the verb προσφέρω, the noun προσφορά is found five times in Hebrews, and all of them in Chapter 10. The noun refers either to the act of 'offering' (Heb 10:10, 14, 18) or the 'offering' itself (Heb 10:5, 8; Bauer et al. 2000, p. 887; Louw & Nida 1996, §53.16). Except for a general reference to offering in Hebrews 10:18, the remaining four noun occurrences refer to the offering of Christ.

namely God, which indicates that the noun should be viewed as a prayer-related word.

### ■ εἰσακούω

The verb εἰσακούω is also found in Hebrews 5:7. While the verb may have the nuance of ‘obey’, it most often refers to the act of God ‘listening’ to petitions, ‘with implication of heeding and responding’ (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 293). This seems to be the nuance of the verb in Hebrews 5:7 as well.

### ■ εὐλογέω/εὐλογία

While the verb εὐλογέω has various nuances, the three most common ways in which the verb is employed in the NT are the following (Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 407–408): (1) ‘to speak well of’ or ‘to praise’, especially God; (2) ‘to ask for bestowal of special favour’, once more, especially from God; and (3) ‘to bestow a favour’ or ‘to provide with benefits’, with God or Christ as the subject. Especially the first and second employments are found in the NT in relation to prayer.

The verb εὐλογέω is found seven times in Hebrews (Heb 6:14<sup>2</sup>; 7:1, 6, 7; 11:20, 21). Two occurrences of the verb are found in reference to God promising to bestow favour on Abraham, namely to bless him (Heb 6:14). In the majority of cases, the verb is employed to refer to blessing others, namely asking God to bestow favour or benefits on others: Melchizedek blesses Abraham (Heb 7:1, 6, 7; cf. Gn 14:19–20), Isaac blesses Jacob and Esau (Heb 11:20; cf. Gn 27:27–40) and Jacob blesses the two sons of Joseph (Heb 11:21; cf. Gn 48:8–22). All of these references can be seen as a form of prayer, but they do not necessitate further discussion.

The noun εὐλογία is found twice in Hebrews (Heb 6:7; 12:17). While it can refer to praise or blessing directed towards God in song or prayer (e.g. Rv 5:12), it is not used with the nuance in Hebrews. In both occurrences of the noun in Hebrews, the noun refers to receiving a blessing from God (Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 408–409).

### ■ ἐντυγχάνω

The verb ἐντυγχάνω is found once in Hebrews (7:25). In the majority of cases in the NT and early Christian literature, it refers to the action of making an ‘earnest request through contact with the pers[on] approached’ (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 341), namely to ‘approach’ or ‘appeal’. In Hebrews 7:25, the verb has the sense of interceding, especially Jesus interceding for those who approach God through him.

## ■ λατρεία/λατρεύω

The verb λατρεύω in the NT and early Christian literature refers to the act of carrying out religious duties, especially of a cultic nature (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 587). Closely linked to this, the noun λατρεία refers to ‘service’ or ‘worship’ of God (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 587), especially performing religious rites (Louw & Nida 1996, §53.14).

The verb is employed six times in Hebrews, referring either to the religious duties performed by the priests in the tabernacle (Heb 8:5; 13:10), the Old Testament (OT) worshippers (Heb 9:9; 10:2) or the worship the addressees are to render to God through or because of Christ (Heb 9:14; 12:28). The noun λατρεία occurs twice in Hebrews, referring to the cultic regulations for or duties of worship followed by the Levitical priests (Heb 9:1, 6). The ritual duties carried out by the priests would include prayers, which makes λατρεία/λατρεύω prayer-related words. However, as Hebrews does not refer to the prayer ministry of the priests explicitly or employ λατρεία/λατρεύω to do so, it is not investigated in more detail in the rest of this investigation.

## ■ ἐμφανίζεῖν τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν

Hebrews 9:24 contains the phrase ‘to appear in presence of God on our behalf’ [ἐμφανισθῆναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν]. Literally, the phrase refers to the ‘becoming visible’ or ‘appearance’ (ἐμφανίζω, cf. Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 325–326) of Christ in the ‘face’, ‘countenance’ or ‘presence’ (πρόσωπον, cf. Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 887–888) of God on our behalf. The verse suggests intercession on the part of Christ for the addressees.

## ■ ἐπικαλέω

The verb ἐπικαλέω is used in a variety of ways in the NT (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 373), referring to the act of calling upon a deity for any purpose, the act of addressing someone by a special term, the act of appealing in a judicial sense or the act of calling on someone as a witness. The first employment can be used in relation to prayer. The only occurrence of the verb in Hebrews (Heb 11:16), however, has the second nuance.

## ■ ἀναφέρωμεν θυσίαν αἰνέσεως

Hebrews 13:15 exhorts the addressees to continually offer a ‘sacrifice of praise’ or ‘praise offering’ [θυσία αἰνέσεως] to God. The cultic connotation is made clear by the use of the recurrent noun θυσία, and the verb ἀναφέρω, which in this context refers to the act of offering up something as a sacrifice (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 75). Αἴνεσις, on the other hand, is a hapax legomenon in the NT, and can be rendered as ‘praise’ (cf. Bauer et al. 2000, p. 27;

Louw & Nida 1996, §33.354). The meaning of the phrase is not clear from the outset. It might be related to prayer and should consequently enjoy closer investigation.

## ■ προσεύχομαι

The verb *προσεύχομαι* has but one meaning in the NT, namely ‘to petition deity’ (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 879) or ‘to speak to or to make requests of God’ (Louw & Nida 1996, §33.178). In other words, the verb refers to the act of praying. The verb is employed once in Hebrews. In words just prior to the benediction and final greetings, the author exhorts the addressees to ‘pray for us’ (Heb 13:18), namely the author and leaders of the church.

## ■ Ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ... καταρτίσαι ἡμᾶς

Hebrews 13:20–21 forms the penultimate passage of the book and contains a benediction, which can be considered as a form of prayer or prayer-wish. This is clear from the use of the only optative in the book (*καταρτίσαι*, Heb 13:21), with the optative expressing an obtainable wish or prayer (Wallace 1996, pp. 481–483).

The verb *καταρτίζω* is primarily used with two nuances in the NT, namely to refer to the act of enabling someone or something to function properly, or the act of preparing something or someone for a specific task (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 526; Louw & Nida 1996, §13.130, 75.5; cf. Coetsee 2018, p. 3). The three occurrences of the verb in Hebrews all have the second nuance (Heb 10:5; 11:3; 13:21).

## ■ Findings

Hebrews contains a number of verbs and nouns that can be considered to be prayer-related. In many cases, however, the words employed have no explicit or obvious reference to prayer, or the reference to prayer is implicit, common, or moot. The passages in Hebrews that contain the most probable references to prayer, and which consequently require further investigation, are:

- Hebrews 4:16 and 10:22 (cf. Heb 7:25; 11:6), which exhorts the addressees to approach [*προσέρχομαι*] God.
- Hebrews 5:7, which refers to Jesus offering up [*προσφέρω*] prayers [*δέησις*] and supplications [*ἱκετηρία*] with loud cries [*κραυγή*] to God, and that God heard [*εἰσακούω*] him.
- Hebrews 7:25, which refers to Jesus interceding [*ἐντυγχάνω*] for those who approach God through him.

- Hebrews 9:24, which too refers to the intercession on the part of Christ for the addressees [ἐμφανισθῆναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν].
- Hebrews 13:15, which exhorts the addressees to continually offer a sacrifice of praise [θυσία αἰνέσεως] to God.
- Hebrews 13:18–19, where the author exhorts [παρακαλέω] the addressees to pray [προσεύχομαι] for him and the leaders of the congregation.
- Hebrews 13:20–21, which contains a prayer or prayer-wish for the addressees.

These passages can be grouped into two categories: (1) the prayers of Jesus and (2) the prayers of the author and addressees. It is to these two categories that the investigation now turns.

## ■ The prayers of Jesus in Hebrews

### ■ Hebrews 5:7: Praying with reverence

As the majority of prayer-related words in Hebrews are found in Hebrews 5:7, special attention is devoted to discussion of the verse within its context.

### □ The context, structure and challenges of Hebrews 5:7–10

The second major division of Hebrews focuses on the high priestly ministry of Christ (Heb 4:14–10:18). Hebrews 4:14–5:10 forms the first passage within this section and functions as an introduction for what follows by introducing the author's discussion of Christ as high priest in more detail (cf. Heb 2:17–18). Three paragraphs can be identified within the passage:

- Hebrews 4:14–16 functions as a hinge between Hebrews 1:1–4:13 and Hebrews 5:1–10:18 and is discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.
- Hebrews 5:1–4 describes the function (v. 1), qualities (vv. 2–3) and divine appointment (v. 4) of earthly (OT) high priests.

Hebrews 5:5–10, closely linked to the previous paragraph by the use of 'so also' [οὕτως καὶ],<sup>146</sup> is viewed by some (cf. Attridge 1989, p. 138) as describing the same aspects of Christ, but in reverse order, namely his divine appointment (Heb 5:5–6), qualities (Heb 5:7–8) and function (Heb 5:9–10). Based on the Greek,<sup>147</sup> Hebrews 5:7–10 forms a unit, and it is treated as such in the discussion that follows.<sup>148</sup>

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146. The keywords of Hebrews 5:1–10 are 'high priest' (ἀρχιερεύς, Heb 5:1, 5, 10) and 'to offer' (προσφέρω, Heb 5:1, 3, 7).

147. Hebrews 5:7–10 forms a long relative clause in Greek [ὅς {...} Μελλισέδεκ].

148. There are, of course, various other ways in which the structure of the passage can be viewed. I tend to agree with Lane (1991a, p. 114) that although there are parallels between the sections, the author does not seem to develop the two paragraphs in a parallel fashion. For a study about the structure of Hebrews 5:1–10, and its influence on the interpretation of Hebrews 5:7–10, see Bachmann (1987, pp. 244–266).

Hebrews 5:7–10 states:

<sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications, with a loud cry and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence; <sup>8</sup> although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; <sup>9</sup> and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> having been designated by God a high priest according to the order or Melchizedek. [Author’s own translation.]

<sup>7</sup> ὃς ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ δεήσεις τε καὶ ἰκετηρίας πρὸς τὸν δυνάμενον σῶζειν αὐτὸν ἐκ θανάτου μετὰ κραυγῆς ἰσχυρᾶς καὶ δακρῶν προσενέγκας καὶ εἰσακουσθεὶς ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας, <sup>8</sup> καίπερ ὢν υἱός, ἔμαθεν ἀφ’ ὧν ἔπαθεν τὴν ὑπακοήν, <sup>9</sup> καὶ τελειωθείς ἐγένετο πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ αἴτιος σωτηρίας αἰωνίου, <sup>10</sup> προσαγορευθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀρχιερεὺς κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ. (UBS<sup>4</sup>)

The interpretation of these verses (especially Heb 5:7–8) is one of Hebrews’ greatest *cruces interpretum*. The possible background of the verses, the confirmation that Jesus was ‘heard’, the interpretation of the phrase ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας, the reference to Jesus ‘learning obedience’ and the meaning of Jesus ‘being perfected’ has led to a plethora of studies. For the sake of the current investigation, clarity is needed on these issues, and for this we turn to a discussion of the text.

## □ The interpretation of Hebrews 5:7–10

The sudden introduction of various Christological themes in these verses, as well as its concise and cryptic nature, have led some scholars to suggest that Hebrews 5:7–10 may be (or contain excerpts from) an early Christian hymn. As with other suggested hymns in Hebrews (e.g. Heb 4:12–13), however, most scholars take Hebrews 5:7–10 to be the author’s own composition, albeit based on or strongly influenced by early Christian tradition (cf. Attridge 1989, pp. 147–148; Ellingworth 1993, p. 285).

The phrase ‘in the days of his flesh’ [ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ] is best interpreted as a reference to Jesus’ humanity (cf. Heb 2:14, 17) and, being a reference to time, to sometime during his earthly life, most probably his ministry, especially his passion. Moreover, it suggests that the author intends a historical reference with Hebrews 5:7 (Ellingworth 1993, pp. 286–287). The verse then indicates that sometime (or ‘sometimes’ [plural], based on the plural ‘days’) during his ministry, Jesus offered up ‘prayers and supplications’,<sup>149</sup> accompanied by ‘a loud cry and tears’,<sup>150</sup> ‘to him who as able to save him from death’, namely God. This description of God strongly suggests that Jesus’ prayers and

149. The two nouns are closely connected and virtually synonymous (Ellingworth 1993, p. 287). The usage of the two in combination ‘intensifies their effect’ (Cockerill 2012, p. 243).

150. The combination of nouns indicates ‘an anguished pleading with a loud noise that may be inarticulate’ (Allen 2010, p. 320).

supplications were related to his (impending) death in some way. It is also clear that the author depicts Jesus' prayers and supplications in cultic language (προσφέρω, see earlier discussion).<sup>151</sup>

Taking the aforementioned into account, it is not difficult to understand why various scholars interpret Hebrews 5:7 as a reference to Jesus' prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:36–46; Mk 14:32–42; Lk 22:39–46). Matthew and Mark state that Jesus was 'sorrowful/emotional and distressed' (λυπέω [Mt 26:37], ἐκθαμβέω [Mk 14:33] and ἀδημονέω), 'even to death' (ἕως θανάτου [Mt 26:38; Mk 14:34]) and prayed that the Father, if possible, would let 'this cup' (his suffering and crucifixion) pass from him.<sup>152</sup> These narratives, however, do not refer to Jesus' 'loud cry and tears' [μετὰ κραυγῆς ἰσχυρᾶς καὶ δακρύων].<sup>153</sup> Such a loud cry would rather be associated with Jesus' second prayer on the cross, when he quotes Psalm 22:1 and cries out 'with a loud voice' [φωνῇ μεγάλῃ] 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachtani?' (Mt 27:46; cf. similar wording in Mk 15:34). Consequently, some view Golgotha as the background of Hebrews 5:7 (Richardson 2008, pp. 51–67), or the passion in general. The possibility exists, of course, that the author was not referring to any recorded prayer of Jesus in Scripture<sup>154</sup> but to early Christian tradition. As could be expected, various other suggestions as to the possible background of this verse have been made.<sup>155</sup>

The final words of Hebrews 5:7 also make it difficult to understand the verse as referring to Gethsemane. It states that Jesus 'was heard because of his reverence' [εἰσακουσθεὶς ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας]. The Synoptic Gospels do not refer to Jesus' prayers as being heard. On the contrary, Jesus's prayers in the garden was not heard; he was not saved from death; he died the

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151. Joseph (2021, pp. 207–227) argues that Hebrews should be read 'not as a Christian text attempting to replace the temple cult with a Christ cult but as a rival, competitive sacrificial discourse within early Judaism'. To substantiate his argument, he reflects on the sacrificial language in Hebrews, among others Hebrews 5:7.

152. The description of Jesus' 'anguish' [ἄγωνία] and sweat became like great drops of blood in Luke 22:44 is omitted in various ancient and a wide variety of witnesses, which 'strongly suggests that they are not part of the original text of Luke' (Metzger 1994, p. 151).

153. By means of comparison, Ellingworth (1993, p. 286) indicates Hebrews 5:7–10 does not recall the language of the Gospels. See his commentary for a list of different words employed in Hebrews and the Gospels.

154. Apart from this, of all the various prayers of Jesus, recorded or referred to in Scripture, only Jesus' prayer in John 12:27–28 seems to meet the criteria of Hebrews 5:7 (cf. Kistemaker 1984, p. 136). After his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus states that his 'soul is troubled' [ἡ ψυχὴ μου τετάρρακται]. Hebrews 5:7, however, has more substantial parallels with the prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane and at Golgotha.

155. This includes specific psalms (cf. Lane 1991a, p. 120), like Psalm 22 (Swetnam 2000, pp. 354–356, 360) or Psalm 114 and 115 (Strobel 1954, pp. 254–258, 265–266), the Psalter as a whole (Bertolet 2017, pp. 1–10), the fervent and emotive prayers of the pious in the books of Maccabees (DeSilva 2000, pp. 190–191) and the early church's baptism tradition (Braumann 1960, pp. 278–280). In my view, the arguments in favour of Gethsemane as (part of) the background are more convincing.

subsequent day on the cross. There are, however, different ways in which the verb ‘heard’ [εἰσακούω] can be understood.<sup>156</sup> Before weighing the options, however, the phrase ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας needs some discussion.

The interpretation of ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας is the apex of the current *crux interpretum*. On the one hand, there is uncertainty as to what the author means with the noun εὐλάβεια; on the other hand, there is a difference of opinion as to how he employs the preposition ἀπό. This preposition has a number of employments (cf. Bauer et al. 2000, pp. 105–107). In the current context, the preposition can be understood in the sense of separation (‘from’ εὐλάβεια), as having a temporal meaning (‘from the time of his εὐλάβεια onwards’; Ellingworth 1993, p. 290) or indicating cause (‘because of’, ‘as a result of’, ‘on the basis of’ his εὐλάβεια).<sup>157</sup>

There are two viable interpretations of the noun εὐλάβεια in the current context. In secular Greek texts εὐλάβεια most often refers to ‘discretion’ or ‘caution’ (Liddell et al. 1996, p. 720). Some consequently interpret the noun as referring to Jesus’ ‘fear’ (e.g. Calvin 1963, p. 119), namely his fear of death (and his fear for God’s judgement of sin). Linked to the preposition ἀπό in the sense of separation, Hebrews 5:7 would then state that Jesus was heard ‘from fear’, that is, from his fear of death. Such an interpretation is not impossible. It would indicate Jesus’ solidarity with mankind; he shared the fear of death in order to save those ‘who all their lives were held in slavery by fear of death’ (Heb 2:15; cf. Thompson 2008, pp. 115–116).

The second possibility is to interpret εὐλάβεια as referring to Jesus’ ‘reverence’ toward or for God. The only other occurrence of εὐλάβεια in Hebrews, in fact in the NT, is Hebrews 12:28, where the context indicates that the noun should be interpreted as ‘reverence’ or ‘piety’. This would support interpreting εὐλάβεια in Hebrews 5:7 as ‘reverence’ as well. Interpreting ἀπό as causal, Hebrews 5:7 would then indicate that Jesus was heard ‘because of his reverence’, that is, because of his reverence for God.<sup>158</sup> This is also supported by the broader context of Hebrews, which nowhere else refers to Jesus’ fear of death, but emphasises his wholehearted submission to God’s will (especially Heb 10:5–10 [by means of Ps 40:7–9

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156. Arguably, one of the most famous attempts at solving the difficulties surrounding Hebrews 5:7b–8a is Von Harnack’s (1929, pp. 62–73) insertion of οὐκ in front of εἰσακουσθεῖς, which he argues was removed in text transmission for dogmatic reasons. Hebrews 5:7–8 would then read: ‘he [Jesus] was not heard, although he was the Son’. There is no text-critical evidence for his suggestion, and, as numerous scholars have pointed out since, there is no reason for negating the verb.

157. For a study of ἀπό in Hebrews 5:7, see Andriessen and Lenglet (1970, pp. 208–212). They argue that Jesus had to go through fear (*‘a dû traverser la crainte’* – French [1970, p. 211]), not so much the common anxiety related to death but because of God’s judgment which he had to bore for all humanity. Cf. Hughes (1977, p. 183).

158. Cockerill (2012, p. 245), who supports this view, indicates that the only drawback of this interpretation ‘is that elsewhere Hebrews does not use ἀπό in a causal sense’.



{LXX 39:7-9}); cf. Ellingworth 1993, p. 290). Consequently, interpreting the phrase ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας as ‘because of his reverence’ (towards God) seems like the most convincing interpretation, and is followed by most translations and scholars (among others, Clivaz 2008, p. 188; Swetnam 2000, p. 352; for discussion, see Richardson 2008, pp. 62–66).<sup>159</sup>

We are now in a better position to reflect on the meaning of the verb ‘heard’ [εἰσακούω]. God ‘hearing’ the prayers of Jesus is intimately linked to Jesus’ reverence for God. Submitting himself wholeheartedly to God’s will, God ‘heard’ his prayers (cf. Ellingworth 1993, p. 291; Lightfoot 1973, p. 172; Moffatt 1924, p. 66; Omark 1958, p. 51). Taking this as the departure point, as well as the view that Jesus’ prayers were related to his death, the content of Jesus’ prayers can be understood in one of two ways (cf. Koester 2001:288):

- Jesus prayed for deliverance from death in some way (or ‘at the end’; Ellingworth 1993:288). Because of his reverent submission, God heard Jesus’ prayer for deliverance from death, but not in the sense that he did not die. He heard it in the sense that Jesus was saved from the power of death by means of resurrection (Attridge 1989:150; Richardson 2008:61; Schreiner 2015:164). Death ‘had no lasting dominion over him’ (Attridge 1979:91); God raised him to life again.
- Jesus prayed for God’s will to be done. In his reverent submission, Jesus prayed for the will of God to be done, and the will of God is exactly what was done. It was God’s will that his Son should suffer on the cross and die for the sins of humanity. In this sense, Jesus’ prayer was heard (Peterson 1982:92; cf. Moffatt 1924:66).

In my view, both interpretations are viable and not necessarily mutually exclusive.<sup>160</sup>

Returning to the question of whether the prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane form the background of Hebrews 5:7, the answer seems highly likely – at least in part. Most scholars view Jesus’ prayers in Gethsemane as forming the background of Hebrews 5:7 (e.g. Allen 2010, p. 324; Bruce 1990, pp. 126–127; Calvin 1963, p. 121; Hughes 1977, p. 182; Kistemaker 1984, p. 136; Mitchell 2007, p. 114; Moffatt 1924, p. 66; Omark 1958, p. 40; Peterson 1982, pp. 86–87; Phillips 2006, p. 171).<sup>161</sup> Others agree but do not limit the

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159. Attridge (1979, p. 90) also interprets the phrase as referring to Jesus’ prayers ‘having been heard because of his reverence (or godly fear)’, based on the fact that the prayer of Jesus conforms ‘to a pattern delineating the ideal prayer of a pious man as that was understood in Hellenistic Judaism’.

160. One possibility is to interpret Jesus’ prayers in Gethsemane as consisting of two ‘stages’: a prayer for deliverance followed by submission to God’s will (Filtvedt 2014, p. 168, n. 31; Peterson 1982, p. 92).

161. Clivaz (2008, pp. 187–209), too, views Gethsemane as the background of Hebrews 5:7. More specifically, he argues that Hebrews 5:7 ‘represents an important step in the direction of the reception of Gethsemane’s prayer as an intercession for the Jewish people’ (Clivaz 2008, p. 188).

background to Gethsemane only (Schreiner 2015, pp. 162–163; Thompson 2008, p. 115). One argument that is sometimes used in support of this view is the use of the plural ‘days’ in the phrase ‘in the days of his flesh’, which may be taken as referring to more than one experience or day (Schreiner 2015, p. 163). Consequently, some view Hebrews 5:7 as referring to ‘the passion as a whole’ (Ellingworth 1993, p. 289) or even Jesus’ ‘utter dependence upon God’ during his entire earthly life which ‘came to its climax in Gethsemane and on the cross’ (Cockerill 2012, p. 244).

Moving over to Hebrews 5:8, the interpretive difficulties of the passage continue.<sup>162</sup> At first glance, the Son ‘learning’ [μανθάνω] obedience seems to suggest that obedience – or a part thereof – was something that he lacked and consequently had to learn. This flies in the face of Hebrews’ confession of the divinity of the Son (e.g. Heb 1:1–4, 5–14), and from the immediate context, his sinlessness (Heb 4:15; cf. Heb 7:26). Closer inspection, however, suggests that the phrase is best understood as a reference to Jesus learning experientially what obedience *entails* through his suffering (cf. Cockerill 2012, pp. 247–248; Swetnam 2000, p. 352). Bauer et al. (2000, p. 615) render the verb in this context as referring to the act of coming to realisation through experience or practice. Through his suffering, which culminated in the events surrounding the cross and his death, Jesus learned what obedience to God costs, or as Attridge (1989, p. 153) puts it, coming ‘to appreciate fully what conformity to God’s will means’. Just like Hebrews 5:7, the background of this verse seems to be Gethsemane, and the passion in general (Allen 2010, p. 322).

Hebrews 5:8 juxtaposes the two natures of Christ. On the one hand, Jesus is referred to as ‘Son’,<sup>163</sup> which recalls previous references to this title and, above all, his divinity. On the other hand, ‘although’ [καίτερ] he is divine, Jesus experienced what all humans experience: learning through suffering,<sup>164</sup> thus emphasising his humanity (Schreiner 2015, p. 164). Although his divine status might suggest that he would be exempted from suffering, this was

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162. Structurally, Hebrews 5:8 forms the main sentence of Hebrews 5:7–10, containing two of the only three indicative verbs in the passage. Von Harnack’s (1929, pp. 62–73) argument that *καίτερ* is always linked to the preceding because it only introduces suffixes is faulty, as indicated by Jeremias (1952–1953, p. 108). It is, however, not necessary to treat Hebrews 5:8 as a parenthesis, as Jeremias (1952–1953, pp. 109–110) does. Brandenburger (1969, pp. 190–224) sees a sharp break between Hebrews 5:7 and Hebrews 5:8–10, arguing that the author has placed two different traditional pieces next to each other, both probably taken from the church’s liturgy. Thurén (1971, pp. 136–137), however, rightly challenges this.

163. The use of the noun ‘Son’ [υἱός] without a definite article also appears elsewhere in Hebrews, also in contexts where his divinity is emphasised (Heb 1:2,5<sup>2</sup>; 3:6; 5:5; 7:28).

164. Learning through suffering is a well-known ancient proverb employed here by the author by means of a nice little wordplay. For the use and history of the wordplay *μαθεῖν-παθεῖν* in Greco-Roman literature, specifically for its use in Hebrews, see Dyer (2021, pp. 489–504). He argues that by using these two words, ‘the author of Hebrews is able to memorably demonstrate that Jesus participated in the full human condition’ (Dyer 2021, p. 489).

not the case (cf. Dyer 2021, p. 503; Moffatt 1924, p. 66). Hebrews 5:8, in other words, emphasises Jesus' solidarity with humanity (cf. Heb 2:5–18).

The contentiousness of the passage is continued in Hebrews 5:9a, with the participial phrase referring to Jesus as 'having been made perfect' [τελειωθεῖς]. In light of the previous discussion, this should not be interpreted as some moral or ethical deficiency on the part of Jesus that was amended. Within the current context, 'having been made perfect' is best interpreted as a reference to Jesus' suffering, death, and especially his exaltation. Him reaching 'perfection' refers to the 'fulfilment' of his goal (Allen 2010, pp. 324–325; DeSilva 2000, p. 199; Ellingworth 1993, p. 294), the 'completion' of his work (Kistemaker 1984, p. 139; Thompson 2008, p. 117), 'the accomplishment of his redemptive mission' (Lane 1991a, p. 122), or 'the validation by God of his perfect obedience'.<sup>165</sup> This is confirmed by the subsequent words and main clause of Hebrews 5:9b, which indicates that 'having been made perfect, he *became* the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him'. Without divorcing Jesus' passion from his glory, Jesus' perfection refers 'to the second, definitive stage of Christ's priesthood which follows on His resurrection' (Swetnam 2000, p. 353), namely his exaltation (Koester 2001, p. 290; Lane 1991a, p. 122).

It is important to note that both here and in Hebrews 2:9, Jesus' perfection and 'his *experience of suffering*' (McCruden 2008, p. 11; emphasis in author's original text) are intimately connected. This would suggest, as Peterson (1982, p. 242, fn. 153; [*emphasis in original*]) puts it, that 'Christ's perfecting is not simply the *result* of his suffering, but *includes* suffering as a necessary part of the process'. The suffering of Jesus brought his obedience to its completion (Cockerill 2012, p. 249).

The passage concludes in Hebrews 5:10 by returning to the divine appointment of Jesus as high priest (cf. Heb 5:1, 5–6), confirming that Jesus has been 'designated' [προσαγορεύω] by God as such according to the order of Melchizedek, paraphrasing Psalm 110:4.

## □ The purpose of Hebrews 5:7–10, and its bearing on prayer in Hebrews

Hebrews 5:7–10 is a fascinating and enigmatic passage. For the purposes of this investigation, it is of great importance to realise what the author's purpose with the passage is (see especially Filtvedt 2014, p. 168).

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165. Peterson (1982, p. 103) argues for a vocational reading of 'perfection' in Hebrews 5:9, which would include the concept of development and proving with respect to the incarnate Christ. Attridge (1989, p. 153) agrees, viewing Jesus' perfection 'at least in part' as 'the adaptation of Christ for his intercessory office through his educative suffering'.

The author's purpose seems to be twofold. On the one hand, he emphasises Jesus' thorough solidarity with humankind (McCormack 2009, p. 64; Moffatt 1924, pp. 64–65). This is vividly portrayed in his depiction of Jesus earnestly praying to God with a loud cry and tears and his statement that Jesus was not exempted from suffering but learned obedience through suffering. The author wishes to underscore the fact that they have a sympathetic high priest (Heb 4:15) who knows what hardship entails and what obedience to God costs. He shared the anguish that the addressees face (Thompson 2008, p. 115). On the other hand, and directly linked to the previous, the author emphasises Jesus' wholehearted obedience to God in the midst of the worst possible suffering. Jesus unreservedly submitted himself to God's will (Heb 10:5–10), rendering his priesthood 'fully effective' (Cockerill 2012, p. 240; cf. Lightfoot 1973, p. 173).

On a secondary level, Jesus is presented in this way so that the addressees can emulate him. He learned obedience in the midst of his suffering; they should do the same. Strikingly, Hebrews 12:4–13 describes the addressees' suffering as a learning experience (Thompson 2008, p. 116). The overall narrative of Hebrews indicates that God leads his children to glory through suffering (Filtvedt 2014, p. 177).

Jesus' manner of prayer should also be emulated by the addressees (Filtvedt 2014, p. 167). In their hardship, they may cry out to God in prayer. In fact, they should, making use of the marvellous opportunity of approaching God through Christ (Heb 4:16; see the following discussion). But, like Jesus, they should pray with reverence. Jesus serves as the example *par excellence* of what it means to approach God with εὐλάβεια (Richardson 2008, p. 52), wholeheartedly submitting himself to the will of God even in the darkest hours. This is what it means for the addressees to follow in the footsteps of their great high priest.

## ■ Hebrews 7:25 and 9:24: Jesus interceding for God's people

Because Hebrews 7:25 and 9:24 both refer to Jesus' intercession, they can be investigated together, provided that their respective contexts are taken into account. Jesus' intercession is also referred to in Hebrews 2:18 and 4:15, but not as explicitly as in the above-mentioned verses. Brief references to these verses are included in the discussion below.

Hebrews 7:23–25 contains one of the author's arguments about the superiority of Jesus' priestly ministry in comparison to that of the Levitical priests. The author's argument is quite simple (in a manner of speaking): death prevented the Levitical priests from continuing in office; Jesus, on the other hand, lives forever and holds his priesthood permanently.

His conclusion is that Jesus 'is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb 7:25).

The parallel between the ministry of the Levitical priests and Jesus is clear: by interceding, Jesus fulfils one of the primary functions of any priest. The exact nature of his intercession, however, is not straightforward, and has 'led to considerable speculation in the history of interpretation' (Attridge 1989, p. 211) and 'considerable disagreement as to what that intercession involves' (Peterson 1982, p. 114). The two most common interpretations are the following:

- Christ's intercession is related to assistance or help (cf. Ellingworth 1993, p. 392). Hebrews refers to both the past and ongoing reproach the addressees endured at the hand of the non-Christian community (cf. Coetsee 2021, pp. 3–4). This interpretation views Christ's intercession as his plea at the right hand of God for the addressees who suffer hardship. Hebrews 4:15–16, which indirectly refers to Christ's intercession, may support this view, as it speaks of Christ's intercession as providing 'help' [βοήθεια] in time of need.<sup>166</sup>
- Christ's intercession is related to the forgiveness of sins (cf. Koester 2001, p. 366). The immediate context refers to the office of the high priest, sins and sacrifices for atonement (cf. Heb 7:23–28). This interpretation views Christ's intercession as 'an extension or applications of his atoning death' (Attridge 1989, p. 211), which may or may not be an act separate from his death. The interpretation of Christ's intercession related to the forgiveness of sins would also seem to agree with the meaning of other NT references to Christ's intercession (cf. Rm 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1).<sup>167</sup>

Some take Christ's intercession to refer to both.<sup>168</sup> In my view, while both interpretations are possible, the immediate context supports the interpretation of Christ's intercession in relation to the forgiveness of sins. More detail, however, is not provided, and before attempting to formulate some of the implications of Christ's intercession, Hebrews 9:24 needs to be considered (cf. Mitchell 2007, p. 155).

Hebrews 9:24 calls attention to the entry of Christ into Heaven itself (in contrast to the earthly sanctuary) to 'appear in the presence of God on our behalf'. The subsequent verse states that Christ's entry is not related

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166. While the reference to Christ being able to 'help' those who are being tested in Hebrews 2:18 may also be used to support this interpretation, Hebrews 2:17 refers to Christ's atonement for the sins of the people, which would support the second interpretation presented.

167. Ellingworth (1993, p. 392) disagrees with the interpretation of Romans 8:34 (and Heb 7:25), stating that 'the language is too general to determine whether prayer for help or for the forgiveness of sins is intended'.

168. Also see Koester's (2001, p. 371) commentary on Hebrews 7:25, which follows after his critical notes.

to offering himself again and again (once more in contrast to the high priest that enters the Holy of Holies year after year with sacrifices), confirming that his sacrifice on the cross was sufficient. Consequently, as seems to be the case in Hebrews 7:25, Christ's intercession in Hebrews 9:24 appears to be related to the forgiveness of sins. The exact nature of Christ's intercession in relation to the forgiveness of sins, however, is once more not specified.

Taking various arguments into consideration, it seems best to conclude that Christ's intercession in the presence of God is *part* of his soteriological work and not a distinct or additional act. The forgiveness of sins achieved by Christ comes through his suffering on the cross, his resurrection *and* his intercession on God's right hand. The two phases of Christ's priestly work, namely his sacrifice and intercession, should be viewed as 'complementary, and thus closely linked' (Ellingworth 1993, p. 479) or 'intimately connected' (Attridge 1989, p. 264). Peterson (1982) aptly summarises this view:

Although Christ appears to fulfil a double function as high priest – the once-for-all act of atonement and the extension of this work into eternity – Cullmann rightly points out that this is actually no double function 'but only one, for everything rests on the one act of sacrifice'. (p. 115)

The author's references to Christ's intercession in both Hebrews 7:25 and 9:24 seem to have a positive albeit exhortative purpose. He claims in Hebrews 7:25 that Christ's intercession for his people is never-ending and effective. In Hebrews 9:24 he claims that Christ appears in the very presence of God on their behalf. Both references should be a source of great assurance for the addressees (cf. Lane 1991a, p. 190), supplying them with the knowledge (or reminding them of their confession) that their great high priest is continually interceding for them on God's right hand (cf. Ps 110:4). On the other hand, these passages indirectly exhort them to make use of the opportunity to approach God in prayer through Christ (Heb 7:25; see the discussion of Heb 4:16 and 10:22), or, as Peterson (1982, p. 115) puts it, 'to enjoy the ongoing benefits of that [Christ's atoning] work'.

## ■ The prayers of the author and addressees in Hebrews

### ■ Hebrews 4:16 and 10:22: Approaching God with 'boldness'

As indicated above, Hebrews' references to 'approaching' [προσέρχομαι] God may be related to prayer in some way. In what follows, Hebrews' two exhortations to 'approach' God, namely in Hebrews 4:16 and 10:22, are investigated in more detail.

Structurally, these passages are related to one another. Hebrews 4:14-16 and 10:19-23 form an *inclusio*<sup>169</sup> and divide Hebrews into three larger sections (Heb 1:1-4:13; 4:14-10:18; 10:19-13:25).<sup>170</sup> Both passages are viewed by various scholars as hinge passages, concluding the previous major division of Hebrews and introducing the next.

In Hebrews 4:14-16, the author returns to the theme of the high priestly ministry of Jesus. Although he previously introduced this theme, especially in Hebrews 2:17-3:1 (which has a number of parallels with Heb 4:14-16), he now develops his discussion in more detail. The purpose of the passage is to challenge the addressees to respond appropriately to Jesus' high priestly ministry (Peterson 1982, p. 75). In the previous passage (Heb 4:1-13), he warned them about missing the opportunity to enter God's rest. Now he comforts them by guiding them in realising anew what kind of high priest they have and the implications thereof.

Jesus is depicted in the passage as a 'great' [μέγας] high priest, indicating that he is unique or holds a 'singular office' (Koester 2001, p. 282). His greatness is expressed by two statements. First, he 'has passed through the heavens' [διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοῦς] (Heb 4:14). The author is referring to Christ's entry into the presence of God (Attridge 1989, p. 139; Lane 1991a, p. 103) with his ascension and subsequent exaltation. The description has subtle allusions to the high priest that enters the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (Lv 16; cf. Hughes 1977, p. 170; McCrudden 2008, p. 102). Christ, unlike the earthly high priest, entered the very presence of God. Secondly, although he is transcendent and glorified, he is able to 'sympathise with our weaknesses' [συμπαθῆσαι ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν] (Heb 4:15), namely the human failure to carry out God's will (Ellingworth 1993, p. 268). This he can do because he was tested in every respect as the addressees were, once more referring to his humanity (cf. Heb 2:17-18). The difference, however, is that Christ remained sinless and was not enticed by sin (Koester 2001, p. 284).

The implications of having such a high priest is twofold, expressed in the passage in the form of two independent, hortatory present subjective clauses: the author and addressees should 'hold fast to our confession' (Heb 4:14b) and 'approach the throne of grace with boldness' (Heb 4:16a). Starting with the first, the content of the 'confession' [ὁμολογία] (cf. Heb 3:1) is not specified, but the use of the definite article ('the confession') suggests

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169. Both passages begin in exactly the same manner (with Ἔχοντες οὖν) and both refer to the 'boldness' [παρρησία] that the addressees have through that which 'Jesus' [Ἰησοῦς], their 'great (high) priest' [ἀρχιερεὺς μέγας and ἱερεὺς μέγας], did for them. Consequently, the addressees are exhorted to 'approach' [προσέρχομαι] God and to 'hold fast' [κρατέω and κατέχω, respectively] to the 'confession' [ὁμολογία].

170. Nauck (1960, pp. 199-206) argues for a tripartite division of the structure of Hebrews based on this *inclusio*, and is followed by many since. The division outlined above is followed amongst others by Weiss (1991).

that it had a specific content known to the addressees (cf. Koester 2001, p. 126; Lane 1991a, p. 104). At the very least, the confession included the acknowledgement that Jesus is the Son of God. The exhortation to ‘hold fast’ [κρατέω] to this confession is an appeal to adhere to this confession, especially in light of their dwindling faith commitment.

The second implication and exhortation is that the author and addressees should ‘approach the throne of grace with boldness’. ‘The throne of grace’ [ὁ θρόνος τῆς χάριτος] is best interpreted as a periphrasis for God.<sup>171</sup> ‘Approaching’ [προσερχομαι] God then implies that the addressees have access to God through Christ, their great high priest, and are encouraged in the most positive terms to continually<sup>172</sup> take advantage of that access. They have, by way of speaking, what Israel never had: ‘immediate access to God and the freedom to draw near to him continually’ (Lane 1991a, p. 115; cf. Hughes 1977, pp. 173-174).

The way in which the addressees are invited to draw near to God, is with ‘boldness’ [παρρησία]. Although the noun refers to the ‘freedom of speech’ of citizens in secular Greek texts, in the current context, it is best rendered as ‘confident self-expression’ (Attridge 1989, p. 142). The addressees have this confidence (and in light of their dwindling faith commitment *should have* this confidence) of approaching God and expressing themselves before him because of the great high priest that they have. The passage concludes that by doing this the addressees will be enabled to receive and find mercy [ἔλεος] and grace [χάρις] for timely assistance in times of trial (Ellingworth 1993, p. 271).

We can now return to the original question of whether ‘approaching’ God in Hebrews 4:16 is related to prayer. In light of the aforementioned explanation, the answer seems to be ‘yes’. The main question to answer would be ‘how’: How would the addressees have understood the author’s invitation to approach God? The simplest answer would be through prayer. Koester’s (2001) argument succinctly summarises the logic:

Here it would be incongruous to think that listeners should physically enter an earthly sanctuary to encounter the God enthroned above the cherubim over the ark of the covenant – the ark had vanished centuries before, and the inner sanctuary was barred to all but the high priest (9:7). Rather, the metaphor invites listeners to encounter God through prayer in a manner as genuine as that of a priest entering a sanctuary. (p. 295)

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171. Some scholars interpret the reference as a heavenly counterpart of the temple’s mercy seat (e.g. Bruce 1990, p. 116; McCrudden 2008, p. 105), but, as Ellingworth (1993, p. 270) indicates, ‘the context allows at most an indirect allusion’.

172. The continual nature of the exhortation is expressed by the present tense of the hortatory subjunctive.



Moreover, the assurance that those approaching God will receive timely assistance (Heb 4:16) suggests that approaching God is related to *asking* for divine assistance during trials (cf. Filtvedt 2014, p. 175; Hughes 1977, p. 79). Consequently, in light of these arguments, various scholars interpret the exhortation to approach God as approaching him through prayer (Attridge 1989, p. 142; DeSilva 2000, p. 205; Koester 2001, p. 284; Lane 1991a, p. 115; Richardson 2008, p. 67; Thompson 2008, p. 113<sup>173</sup>).

In short, Hebrews 4:16 states that the addressees have free access to God through Christ, their great high priest. They are positively invited and exhorted to continually take advantage of this access by approaching God in prayer. Their prayers may be bold, that is, full of confidence because of who Christ is and what he has done. By approaching God in this way in prayer, they may be sure that they will receive divine and timely assistance during trials.

Turning to Hebrews 10:19–25, the passage as a whole and the exhortation to approach God is very similar to Hebrews 4:14–16 and the exhortation contained in it. The passage follows directly after the lengthy exposition of Christ's high priestly ministry (Heb 7:1–10:18) and can be considered as the author's final conclusion based on the second major division of Hebrews (Heb 4:14–10:18).<sup>174</sup>

Structurally, Hebrews 10:19–25 consists of a long and complex period. The passage starts by summarising for the addressees what they have (Heb 10:19–21) before turning to exhortations based on this (Heb 10:22–25). The addressees are said to have two things: 'boldness to enter the sanctuary' [παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων] (Heb 10:19a) and 'a great priest over the house of God' [ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ] (Heb 10:21; i.e. God's people; cf. Heb 3:6). The former is qualified by a brief and yet rather complex summary of the sacrifice of Christ and the access he provides to God (Heb 10:19b–20).<sup>175</sup> The author's overall argument, however, is clear: Believers have the 'authorisation' (Lane's [1991b, pp. 274, 283] translation of *παρρησία*) to approach God because of what Jesus has done for them. The similarities and echoes with Hebrews 4:14–16 are clear, as well as the contrasts with Levitical regulations: In contrast to the restrictions of the earthly sanctuary, where it was unthinkable to enter the Holy of Holies, believers may (and *must*) now approach God through Christ who inaugurated unprecedented

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173. Thompson (2008, p. 113) interprets *προσέρχομαι* as drawing near in worship and prayer.

174. Among others, this is suggested by the author's use of the conjunction *οὖν* and the vocative *ἀδελφοί*.

175. Most scholars point out that Hebrews 10:19–20 are 'unusually difficult' (Lane 1991b, p. 282), 'pose[s] several related problems' (Ellingworth 1993, p. 519) and contains 'complex imagery' (Attridge 1989, p. 287). Especially the relationship between the phrase *τοῦτ' ἐστὶν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ* to the rest of Hebrews 10:19–20 is uncertain. For discussion, see Peterson (1982, pp. 153–154) and Lane (1991b, pp. 273–285).

access to him by means of his own blood (cf. Koester 2001, pp. 443, 448; McCrudden 2008, p. 120).

The passage then turns to exhorting the addressees to three things by means of three cohortatives (Heb 10:22–25):

1. ‘Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith’ (Heb 10:22), which is discussed in more detail below.
2. ‘Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope’ (Heb 10:23), which seems to be a call to endurance.
3. ‘Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds’ (Heb 10:24), which focuses on the responsibility of the addressees towards one another (cf. Coetsee 2021, pp. 6, 9). One practical way of doing this is to encourage one another to meet together (Heb 10:25).

The logical flow from the first benefit the addressees have to the first cohortative is clear: The addressees have the authorisation to approach God through the sacrifice of Christ (Heb 10:19); they should now continually<sup>176</sup> make use of this wonderful opportunity by doing it (Heb 10:22).<sup>177</sup> Their approach can be ‘with a true heart in full assurance of faith’ [μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως], which seem to be ‘descriptive of the certainty and stability that are created in Christians as a result of the work of Christ’ (Lane 1991b, p. 286). The reason they can approach God in this way is that their ‘hearts’ are ‘sprinkled clean from an evil conscience’ [ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς] and their ‘bodies washed with pure water’ [ἠλουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ]. Both phrases refer once again to the effects of Christ’s sacrifice, with the first stressing the interior cleansing he affected in believers (cf. Bruce 1990, p. 254), and the second most probably alluding to baptism ‘where the effects of Christ’s death and exaltation were regularly understood to be appropriated by believers’ (Attridge 1989, p. 289).

As with Hebrews 4:16, it seems reasonable and viable to interpret the exhortation to ‘approach’ [προσέρχομαι] God in Hebrews 10:22 as a reference to approaching him in prayer (Dahl 1951, p. 409; Koester 2001, p. 449; Lane 1991b, p. 286). That being said, the two remaining cohortatives may express different facets of this ‘approach’ to God (cf. DeSilva 2000, p. 340). In fact, one can argue that the rest of Hebrews, especially the various references to endurance and acts of faith in the third major division (Heb 10:19–13:25), indicates different aspects of what ‘approaching’ God entails. The greatest common denominator for ‘approaching’ God would then be ‘worship’ (cf. Attridge 1989, p. 288; Bruce 1990, p. 249; Lane 1991b, p. 286; Thompson

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176. Once more, the continual aspect of the cohortative is expressed by the use of the present subjunctive.

177. Although Hebrews 10:22 does not explicitly refer to approaching ‘God’, he is clearly implied.

2008, p. 204; Thüsing 1965, pp. 1-17<sup>178</sup>).<sup>179</sup> Approaching God in any form of worship, which includes prayer, would be considered as approaching God. Unlike Hebrews 4:16, therefore, the immediate context of Hebrews 10:22 does not suggest that prayer is the only or specific reference to approaching God (Peterson 1982, pp. 79, 154-155).

The remaining occurrences of προσέρχομαι in Hebrews (7:25; 10:1; 11:6; 12:18, 22) do not have implicit references to prayer. Again, the more general interpretation of ‘worship’ (‘worshippers’ in Heb 10:1, possibly also Heb 11:6) fits these contexts, which would include but is not limited to prayer.<sup>180</sup>

## ■ Hebrews 13:15: Praising God

Hebrews 13:7-19 is a complex passage in terms of content. It starts and ends with exhortations regarding the ‘leaders’ [ἡγούμενοι] of the congregation and ‘affirms the reality of Christ’s eternal faithfulness with a warning against strange teachings’ (Coetsee 2016, p. 189; Heb 13:7-9, 17-19). Bracketed in-between is a description of the sacrifice of Christ and positive exhortations spelling out its implications (Heb 13:10-16). The author uses Yom Kippur imagery for a final time to describe the suffering of Jesus ‘outside the city gate/camp’ [ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς/πύλης] (Heb 13:11, 12), exhorting the addressees to ‘go to him outside the camp’ [ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς] (Heb 13:13). This entails a willingness to bear the ‘abuse’/‘reproach’ [ὀνειδισμός] he endured (Heb 13:13), continually offering up ‘a sacrifice of praise’ [θυσία αἰνέσεως] to God (Heb 13:15), not neglecting to do good, and sharing what they have (Heb 13:16). Doing this is what the author of Hebrews views as the proper reaction to the sacrifice of Christ.

The term ‘sacrifice of praise’ can refer to the OT thanksgiving sacrifice (cf. Lv 7:12-15 LXX), but as the context and various scholars point out, it more likely has a metaphorical application (e.g. Hamm 2004, p. 52). Αἰνέσεως should be interpreted as an exegetical genitive, referring to a sacrifice consisting of praise. This is made explicit in the subsequent clause, which explains the ‘sacrifice of praise’ as ‘the fruit of lips that confess his name’. The latter is a Semitic figure for speech (Lane 1991b, p. 550; cf. Hs 14:3 LXX). ‘His name’

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178. Thüsing (1965, pp. 11-12), while acknowledging the general interpretation of προσέρχομαι as ‘worship’, stating that it embraces all Christian expressions of life [*alle christlichen Lebensäußerungen*], argues that ‘approaching’ God refers to the Eucharist especially.

179. The immediate context indicates that this worship has a corporate element (cf. Ellingworth 1993, pp. 522-523; Lane 1991b, p. 286; Heb 10:25) and calls for ‘ongoing expression of an existing relationship with God’ (Peterson 1982, p. 155).

180. Koester (2001, p. 365) interprets ‘approach’ in Hebrews 7:25 as a reference to prayer. The perfect tense of the verb in Hebrews 12:22 may refer to a decisive moment in the past, namely the addressees’ conversion or baptism (Bruce 1990, p. 355; Hughes 1977, p. 79).

should be understood as God's name. Consequently, a sacrifice of praise can be understood as a verbal praise confession of God's name in song or prayer (cf. Heb 13:6). Hamm (2004, p. 52) interprets the phrase as referring to Christian worship and perhaps evangelisation.

These findings have a number of implications. On the one hand, the continuity and discontinuity between the sacrifices offered by worshippers under the old and new covenant is clear. Just like under the old covenant, believers are to continually offer sacrifices to God. But unlike the old covenant, bloody sacrifices are no longer required; only sacrifices of praise are prescribed. On the other hand, and of special importance for the current investigation, the addressees are explicitly exhorted to praise God verbally through Christ. Jesus is described as the medium through which praise is to be rendered to God (indirectly linking with the passages that refer to Christ's intercession and mediatorial role; cf. Heb 7:25; 9:24). The call to do this 'continually' [διὰ παντός]<sup>181</sup> makes it clear that the author of Hebrews views praising God through Christ as one of the basic ingredients of prayer. Put differently, part and parcel of the addressees' thankful reaction to Christ's atonement is verbally praising God. The author reached a similar conclusion at the end of his fifth and final warning passage in the previous chapter, exhorting the addressees to give 'thanks' [χαρίζ], describing this as offering acceptable worship to God (Heb 12:28).

## ■ Hebrews 13:18–19: Praying for ministry

The chiasmic introduction and conclusion of Hebrews 13:7–19, namely Hebrews 13:7–9 and 13:17–19, focus on the leaders of the addressees. The word 'leader' [ἡγούμενος] is derived from the verb ἡγέομαι, which refers to the action of 'going before' or 'leading the way'. In Hebrews 13, the term is used to refer to the religious leaders of the local church (Heb 13:7, 17, 24; cf. Coetsee 2016, pp. 190–191). Read as a whole, it is clear what the author of Hebrews expected of both the leaders and addressees (cf. Coetsee 2016:191–197):

- The leaders were expected to speak the word of God (Heb 13:7a), to be an example in conduct and faith (Heb 13:7b), to keep watch over the church's spiritual well-being (Heb 13:17b).
- The addressees were expected to remember what their leaders taught them (Heb 13:7a), to imitate their conduct and faith (Heb 13:7b), to obey and submit to their leaders (Heb 13:17a), and to pray for them (Heb 13:18–19).

Hebrews 13:18 starts with the exhortation: 'Pray for us' [Προσεύχσθε περὶ ἡμῶν]. As indicated above, the verb refers to the action of petitioning or

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181. Unlike the majority of translations and commentaries, Hamm (2004, pp. 50, 52) argues that διὰ παντός in Hebrews 13:15 should be translated as 'regularly' rather than 'continually' due to its reference to the context of temple sacrifices.

making requests of God. The time and mode of the verb (a present imperative) refer to continuous action (cf. Coetsee 2016, p. 197): the addressees are exhorted to pray and to keep on praying for 'us'. In light of Hebrews 13:17, the author's request to pray for 'us' makes it clear that he viewed himself as one of the leaders of the addressees,<sup>182</sup> and that he here requests prayer for all of them.<sup>183</sup>

At first glance, it is not clear what the content of the addressees' prayer should be. He motivates the call for prayer in the rest of Hebrews 13:18 (introduced with the conjunction γάρ, expressing cause): because the leaders have a 'clear conscience' [καλή συνείδησις], and they desire to 'conduct themselves' [ἀναστρέφω] (cf. ἀναστροφή; Heb 13:7) 'appropriately' and 'honourably' [καλῶς] in all things. This seems to suggest that the author is convinced of their good intentions and honourable conduct among and pertaining to the addressees in the past and present and asks the addressees to pray that God will keep it this way in the future. They *desire* [θέλω] to do this; in order for this desire to come to fruition, the blessing of God is indispensable. While Hebrews 13:18 is 'clearly apologetic' (Lane 1991b, p. 556), suggesting that the addressees in some way were guilty of resenting the counsel and guidance of their leaders, the precise background or context is not clear. There is no reason, however, to conclude that the author was not sincere in his request for prayer (cf. Cockerill 2012, p. 712). In sum, it seems as if the author requests the addressees to pray for the leaders of the congregation to fulfil their divine calling and ministry, and to fulfil it well.

In the subsequent verse, the author urges the addressees 'all the more' [περισσοτέρως] to pray for them 'so that' [ἵνα] he (singular) 'may be restored' [ἀποκαθίστημι] to them 'very soon' (the comparative τάχιον). The author was removed from the addressees and desired to be with them. The precise reason for the author's absence from the addressees is not clear, and 'cannot be ascertained' (Attridge 1989, p. 403).<sup>184</sup> Nonetheless, it seems safe to conclude that the author's additional motivation in Hebrews 13:19 for his prayer request is his desire to visit and minister to the addressees.

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182. Based on the switch between 'us/we' and 'I' in Hebrews 13:18 and Hebrews 13:19, I side with scholars who do not view 'us' in Hebrews 13:18 as an epistolary plural or a stylistic variation (cf. DeSilva 2000, p. 510; Ellingworth 1993, p. 725; Kleinig 2017, p. 713; contra Attridge 1989, p. 402; Bruce 1990, p. 386; Mitchell 2007, p. 301; Moffatt 1924, p. 241).

183. Similar direct or indirect prayer requests are found in the Pauline epistles (Rm 15:30; 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:18-19; Phlp 1:19; Col 4:3; 1 Th 5:25; 2 Th 3:1; Phlm 22). Some of these passages are discussed in previous chapters of this volume in the 'Reformed Theology in Africa Series'.

184. Most likely, the addressees knew the reason for his delay (Cockerill 2012, p. 713). The broader context of Hebrews 13:17-25 might suggest that he was forcibly detained (Koester 2001, p. 573) or imprisoned (Cockerill 2012, pp. 713-714).

The fact that he requests such a prayer ‘all the more’ seems to imply that the addressees have been praying for the author and leaders, but he requests them to do this more intensely (Ellingworth 1993, p. 725; cf. Bruce 1990, p. 386).

Taking all of this into account, in Hebrews 13:18–19, the author exhorts the addressees to continually request God (1) to bring the desire of the author and the other leaders of the congregation to minister faithfully to the addressees to fruition and (2) to restore the author to the addressees so that he can fulfil this calling.<sup>185</sup> In short, in Hebrews 13:18–19, the addressees are called to pray for the faithful ministry of their leaders towards them.

The implications of this prayer request within the wider context of Hebrews are striking. The book of Hebrews was most probably written to ‘a small, unidentified second generation Jewish-Christian house church’ who were dwindling in their faith commitment, in part because of ‘being out of favour in the broader community for a longer period of time’ (Coetsee 2021, p. 4). This dwindling in their faith commitment is addressed in a variety of manners in the book (cf. Coetsee 2021, pp. 4–9). The author’s prayer request in Hebrews 13:18–19 also addresses the issue. Dwindling in their faith commitment, the addressees (or some of them at least) did not heed the word of God their leaders spoke to them (cf. Heb 13:7a) and probably did not imitate their conduct and faith (cf. Heb 13:7b) or obey and submit to them (cf. Heb 13:17a). This inevitably led to the leaders fulfilling their ministry with ‘sighing’ [στενάζω], and not with joy (Heb 13:17c). In order to counteract this, the author exhorts the addressees to pray for their leaders to remain true to their calling of ministering faithfully to the addressees. This prayer request has a twofold function: firstly, it intercedes for the leaders, asking God to keep them faithful in their ministry; secondly, by praying for the leaders, the addressees are once more reminded of the high calling of their leaders and their expected conduct towards them.

The passage may have an additional implication. It might be that the addressees are indirectly reprimanded for their short-sightedness with regard to the broader ministry. Wrapped up in their own struggles, the addressees have lost touch with the ministry of the author and his fellow leaders. By praying for the ministry of their leaders, the addressees would be called to look past their own hardships to the ministry of God’s faithful outside their borders. By doing this, not only would their vision of ministry be realigned to agree with that of the author, but their hardship would be put alongside that of fellow Christians and interpreted within this light.

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185. Some interpret Hebrews 13:19 as stating the content of the prayer request in Hebrews 13:18. This would result in the author requesting only one thing in prayer, namely, restoration (cf. Attridge 1989, p. 403). Part of the argument for or against this interpretation is whether ‘us’ is taken as an epistolary plural or not.

## ■ Hebrews 13:20–21: ‘Praying’ for sanctification

Hebrews 13:20–21 is the penultimate pericope of the book and may be viewed as the final words of the epistle or sermon proper.<sup>186</sup> The passage consists of a benediction. After requesting prayers for himself and his fellow leaders (Heb 13:18–19), the author now prays for the addressees (Moffatt 1924, p. 242). As God is not addressed directly but is referred to in the third person, Hebrews 13:20–21 is best described as a prayer-wish.<sup>187</sup> But, as Cranfield (1967, p. 437) correctly states, these two verses ‘are really tantamount to a prayer’.

Broadly speaking, the prayer-wish consists of an invocation (Heb 13:20) followed by a request (Heb 13:21). The syntactical structure of the prayer-wish can visually be seen in Figure 8.1. Various scholars indicate that the prayer-wish integrates several important themes from the rest of the sermon (cf. DeSilva 2000, p. 510).

The passage starts with a semi-elaborate description of God, the subject of the prayer-wish throughout, and Jesus. God is referred to as the God of ‘peace’, a common phrase in the NT in general, especially benedictions (cf. Rm 15:33; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Th 5:23; 2 Th 3:16). The reference to peace is best understood within the Christological framework of Hebrews, namely the peace which now exists between God and the addressees because of the sanctifying work of Christ. This is implied by the soteriological description which follows.<sup>188</sup>

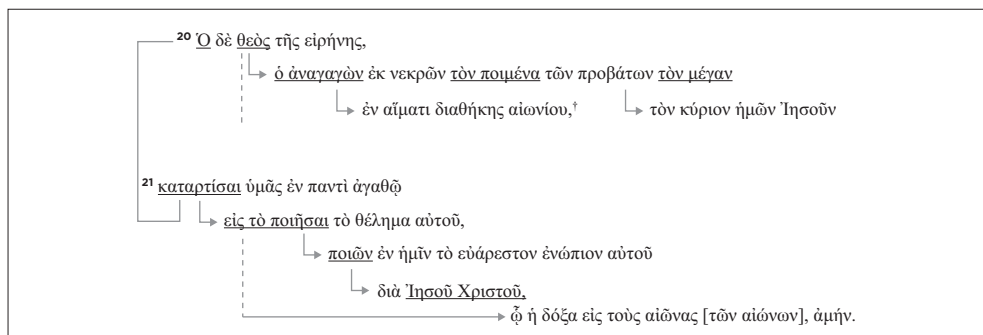
The author refers to God as the one who ‘brought up’ or ‘led back’ [ἀνάγω] Jesus from the dead. While the reference is clearly to Christ’s resurrection, this is not the standard word used in the NT to refer to this event (cf. the use of ἐγείρω in Heb 11:19). Moreover, this is the first and only explicit reference to the resurrection of Jesus in Hebrews. By making use of this specific verb, as with his frequent references to Jesus’ glorification on the right hand of God (by means of Ps 110:1), the author emphasises the glorification of Jesus (cf. Bruce 1990, p. 388; Thompson 2008, p. 285). Jesus is described as the ‘great shepherd of the sheep’, echoing familiar passages in the OT and NT (cf. Ps 23; Jn 10:11, 14; 1 Pt 2:25; 5:4).

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186. Hebrews 13:22–25 contains final exhortations and greetings and may have been added by the author upon sending the epistle/sermon to the addressees. Most scholars treat Hebrews 13:22–25 as part of the author’s original composition. For arguments favouring viewing Hebrews 13:22–25 as a possible later addition, see Steyn (2012, pp. 235–253).

187. Kleinig (2017, p. 731) does not view Hebrews 13:20–21 as a prayer-wish, but ‘a performative utterance’, doing what it says, namely conveying ‘God’s blessing to the congregation as it is spoken in his name’.

188. Whitlark (2016, pp. 155–178) interprets the phrase ‘God of peace’ and references to victory within the Roman imperial context, arguing that Hebrews 13:20 gives the addressees ‘confidence that God is able to equip them with and work in them all things necessary to accomplish his will – even in the face of a hostile imperial culture’ (2016, p. 157).



Source: Author's own work.

**FIGURE 8.1:** The structure of Hebrews 13:20–21.

The syntactical function of the phrase ‘by/through the blood of the eternal covenant’ [ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης αἰωνίου] is understood in a variety of ways (cf. Ellingworth 1993, pp. 729–730; Lane 1991b, p. 559). It seems best to interpret the phrase as a concise summary of Jesus’ sacrificial death and what he achieved through it (cf. Heb 2:14; 8:6–13; 9:12, 14; 13:12).

The main verb of the passage is the aorist optative *καταρτίσαι* (Heb 13:21), which, as indicated, is the only optative in the book of Hebrews. The optative is best viewed as a ‘voluntative’, expressing an obtainable wish or prayer (Wallace 1996, pp. 481–482), with the aorist indicating ingressive or iterative action.

*Καταρτίζω* in Hebrews 13:21 is best rendered as ‘equip’ (ESV; NIV), ‘make complete’ (NRSV; Lane 1991b, p. 558), ‘furnish’ (Attridge 1989, p. 404) or ‘fitting out’ (Peterson 1982, p. 279).<sup>189</sup> What this entails is made explicit in the result clause which follows, namely, ‘so that you may do his will’ (Heb 13:21b), as well as the participle clause ‘doing in/among us that which is pleasing in his sight’ (Heb 13:21c). The subject of the participle clause is still God, as is made clear by the person and number of the participle. The phrase ‘through Jesus Christ’ [διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] seems to refer to an instrument or medium (cf. Filtvedt 2014, p. 177): through Christ, ‘what is pleasing is produced’ (Attridge 1989, p. 407) by God. The prayer-wish ends with a traditional doxology, although the recipient of the glory is ambiguous.<sup>190</sup>

189. The verb *καταρτίζω* and its derivatives are used with more or less the same nuance in other intercessory prayers and benedictions in the New Testament (cf. 2 Cor 13:9; 1 Th 3:10; 1 Pt 5:10).

190. The glory can either be attributed to God (Bruce 1990, p. 389; Ellingworth 1993, p. 731; Cockerill 2012, p. 718; Lane 1991b, p. 559) or Jesus (Attridge 1989, pp. 407–408; Filtvedt 2014, p. 177). Although I tend to side with the former, the author’s formulation seems to be deliberately ambiguous.



Taken as a whole, the gist of the author's prayer-wish in Hebrews 13:20-21 is that God increasingly makes the addressees complete in everything good in order to do his will. This will happen if God works in them that which is pleasing in his sight through Christ (cf. Phil 2:13). In short, the author earnestly expresses the prayer-wish for the further sanctification of the addressees (cf. Cranfield 1967, p. 439). He prays 'that God may supply what is defective or deficient within the members of the assembly so that they may live the Christian life in a manner which will please him' (Lane 1991b, p. 564). Cockerill (2012) captures the appropriateness of this prayer right at the end of the sermon:

It was most appropriate for the pastor to conclude by praying that God would enable his hearers to do all that he has been urging them to do through the Jesus whose sufficiency he has so aptly described. (p. 714)

A number of conclusions can be drawn about the sanctification of the addressees from this prayer-wish. Firstly, the addressees were in need of being made complete. When it came to their spiritual maturity, they were not who they were supposed to be yet. This agrees with the author's stern depiction of them earlier in the sermon (cf. Heb 5:11-14), as well as the suggested overall purpose of the book. Throughout, the author encourages the addressees to come to a more comprehensive comprehension and appropriate application of their faith (Coetsee 2021, pp. 1-10). The prayer, thus, contains 'an implicit exhortation' (Attridge 1989, p. 407). Secondly, while the prayer-wish expresses the need for the addressees' sanctification, it simultaneously stresses that they cannot make themselves complete. Only God can do this. But this is what the author prays for. In other words, there seems to be an interplay in the prayer-wish between what God does for the addressees and their reaction to it. Or, as Ellingworth (1993, p. 730) succinctly puts it, the prayer 'touches the heart of the mystery of God working his will within the human will, without destroying its freedom'. In my view, this interplay is found throughout Hebrews. While God has revealed himself even better through his Son (Heb 1:1-2a) and while the high priestly ministry of Jesus is perfect (Heb 7:1-10:18), God's workings call for a reaction. The addressees have the responsibility to respond to God's gracious acts with faith, obedience and reverence.

Coming to the implications of this prayer-wish for our investigation of prayer in Hebrews, the following should be noted:

- As with previous prayers (or passages related to prayers) in Hebrews, the prayer-wish of Hebrews 13:20-21 is directed towards God. 'The prayer thus conforms to the theocentric focus in Hebrews' (Filtvedt 2014, p. 176). That being said, the prayer-wish is implicitly Trinitarian. It is directed towards God, who brought Jesus from the dead and graciously works among the addressees that which is pleasing in his sight through his Son, and this sanctifying work is presumably carried out by the Holy Spirit (Cranfield 1967, p. 441).

- Jesus is once more described as an intermediary and implicitly referred to as an example. As stated, Jesus is indicated as the medium through which God produces what is pleasing in the addressees (Heb 13:21). Although this does not refer to Jesus' intercessory role as elsewhere in Hebrews (Heb 7:25; 9:24), Jesus is once more described in intermediary terms. By praying that the addressees will do God's will, the addressees would be reminded of the author's depiction of Jesus in Hebrews 10:5-10 as 'coming' to do the will of God. Per implication, as suggested in Hebrews 5:7-8, the addressees are once more to follow the example of Jesus by completely submitting themselves to God's will (cf. DeSilva 2000, p. 512).

## ■ Putting everything together: Prayer in Hebrews

Having investigated each reference to prayer in Hebrews in detail, it is now time to put everything together, reflecting on what Hebrews as a whole reveals about prayer.

As with any other theological theme in Hebrews, the book's references to prayer are intimately connected to its overall message and the context of the addressees. Elsewhere I argued that the author's primary aim with Hebrews is to guide the addressees to a more comprehensive comprehension of the person and work of Christ and an appropriate response to this knowledge. This he does in order to rekindle the flame of their dwindling faith commitment (Coetsee 2021, pp. 1-10).

Taking this as the departure point, the addressees' more comprehensive comprehension of the person and work of Christ includes knowledge of his prayers during his earthly ministry and his current prayers exalted at God's right hand. The addressees are taught (or reminded) that their great high priest earnestly prayed to God during the darkest hours of his ministry (Heb 5:7). In the course of his passion, most probably in Gethsemane, he prayed with reverence, wholeheartedly submitting himself to the will of God. Christ's reverent obedience rendered his office as high priest effective, and this is (or should be) a source of great assurance and comfort to the disheartened addressees. In addition, they should be comforted by Christ's thorough solidarity with humankind, realising that he can truly sympathise with them. Finally, they should be comforted by the fact that, at this very moment, Christ appears in the very presence of God on their behalf, unceasingly and effectively interceding for them (Heb 7:25; 9:24).

Based on this, the appropriate response of the addressees is to approach God in prayer and worship (Heb 4:16; 10:22). Knowing (or being reminded) that they have access to God through Christ, their great high priest, they are encouraged to continually make use of that access by approaching God in prayer.

The manner in which the addressees should pray is twofold. On the one hand, they are explicitly exhorted to pray with 'boldness' [παρρησία] (Heb 4:16; 10:22), that is, with confidence and certainty because of the high priestly ministry of Christ. On the other hand, they are implicitly called to follow the example of Christ by praying with 'reverence' [εὐλάβεια] (Heb 5:7), that is, submitting themselves to the will of God.

Hebrews' references to praying with boldness and reverence are arguably its greatest contribution to a Biblical Theology of prayer. At first sight, boldness and reverence appear as opposites. To pray with boldness would exclude reverence, and to pray with reverence would exclude boldness. The masterstroke of the author of Hebrews is his insistence that it is both possible and necessary to pray with both. Having Christ as their high priest, the addressees are invited to pray with boldness, which certainly would include crying out to God for deliverance from or assistance in their current hardship, just like Christ prayed in the midst of his agony. Knowing, however, that God is leading his children to glory through suffering, that suffering is a learning experience, and that Christ himself was not spared, their prayers should be characterised by reverence, just like the prayers of Jesus, submitting themselves to the will of God in everything. To pray with both boldness and reverence is to pray as Jesus prayed.

Turning to the other references to prayer in Hebrews, the author partially indicates what the content of the addressees' prayers should be. In thankful response to what God has done for them in Christ, their prayers should always contain praise (Heb 13:15). Understanding the high calling of their leaders anew, they should continually pray for them to fulfil their ministry faithfully (Heb 13:18-19). Realising their need to grow in maturity during their earthly pilgrimage, the addressees should pray for their further sanctification, echoing the prayer-wish of the author (Heb 13:21).

## ■ Conclusion

By way of conclusion, brief reflection is provided on some of the implications of the findings of this chapter for the church in Africa. While the context of Hebrews cannot simply be equated with that of any modern context, the principles deduced from the book can be applied in any context by the faith community.

Taking a dwindling faith commitment and hardship because of external factors as the general background of Hebrews, its message remains applicable for the church in the 21st century, especially the church in Africa. Along with more recent hardships related to a worldwide pandemic and war in Europe, Africa faces a number of alarming challenges, such as poverty, corruption, terrorism, poor education, a lack of health care services

and questions related to environmental sustainability. Some of these challenges also result in a dwindling faith commitment, although this is certainly not the only cause.

In the midst of these hardships, the findings from the book of Hebrews call the church in Africa to pray with boldness and reverence. The church can approach God with boldness, confidently knowing that they have glorious access to the Father through the Son. Such an approach should include interceding for the hardships endured by churches and communities, asking God to bring about change. Following the example of their Lord, these prayers will also be drenched in reverence, confessing that while God is able to do anything, and while the church prays for change, they humbly submit to his will.

This is not to suggest that prayer is the only answer to these challenges. This chapter did not reflect on the calling of the addressees in bringing about change in their congregation or community. Such a study would indeed greatly contribute to the current reflection. Focusing on prayer solely, however, Hebrews' unique prayer-emphasis would suggest that in all problems faced by the church and communities, God should be boldly and reverently approached in prayer. By emulating Christ in this manner of prayer, the church can expect these prayers to be 'heard' (Heb 5:7).

The references to prayer in Hebrews 13 suggest that the church's prayers should also be characterised by praise, intercession for Christian ministry and the plea for further sanctification. Perseverance in such prayer by churches and their members in Africa will, without a doubt, have a great impact on their way of thinking and living, and that of the communities in their vicinity.



# Prayer in James

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## ■ Introduction

Prayer is recognised as an important aspect of the life of faith and is prominent in many parts of Scripture. It is also prominent in the Letter of James, occurring in the introduction (Ja 1:5–8) and the conclusion (Ja 5:13–18), as well as in the author’s treatment of strife in the community (Ja 4:1–10). James’s treatment of prayer is closely related to the key themes of the letter, including single-minded devotion to God, wisdom and practical obedience. Its importance is also seen in the way Elijah, an important Old Testament (OT) figure, is used as an example to believers in their own practice of prayer (Ja 5:17–18).

Commentators and researchers have frequently noted different aspects of James’s<sup>191</sup> teaching on prayer in the course of expounding the letter, and

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191. This study refers to the author of the letter as ‘James’, without entering into scholarly debates regarding authorship, date, et cetera.

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a few studies have focused specifically on prayer in the letter.<sup>192</sup> However, there remains a need for a thoroughly exegetical, Biblical Theological treatment of prayer in the Letter of James.

In order to further the general discussion on prayer in the Letter of James, as well as to contribute to the broader Biblical Theology of prayer, this chapter will examine the three passages in James which deal substantially with prayer, seeking to address the following questions:

1. What kinds of prayer are envisaged by the author of James?
2. What attitude is required of those who come to God in prayer?
3. How certain can one be of receiving from God that which is requested in prayer?

The three passages to be studied are James 1:5–8, 4:1–10 and 5:13–18. They are examined exegetically and in relation to important related passages in Scripture with a view to understanding James's contribution to a Biblical Theology of prayer.

## ■ Understanding James in relation to the Jewish Scriptures and the Jesus tradition

The passages in James which relate to prayer have definite links both to the Jewish Scriptures and to the teachings of Jesus, and it is helpful to establish an approach to dealing with these links. Understanding James's use of these sources will help to shed light on his own meaning and intentions; Biblical Theological developments in the topic will also be elucidated.

It is generally recognised that the Letter of James has many links to and echoes of the Jewish Scriptures and the teaching of Jesus, as well as to extra-canonical Jewish texts, Hellenistic philosophy and other early Christian writings (e.g. Allison 2013, pp. 51–70; Jackson-McCabe 2019; Mason 2019, p. 27; Mayor 1913, pp. lxix–cv). Scholarly study has often sought to identify definite quotations and deliberate allusions to the Jewish Scriptures or to the teaching of Jesus. While there is some value in this approach, it has proven difficult to identify such allusions with certainty, and a different approach to James's use of his sources, especially the Jewish Scriptures and the Jesus tradition, may be more helpful (Bauckham 2019, pp. 9–11).

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192. Studies focusing on prayer in the Letter of James include Grottenberg (2019), Michaels (2001) and Naseri (2021). Among commentators, Davids (1982, pp. 56–57) includes prayer as one of the themes of James. Kovalishyn's (2018, pp. 1041–1044) study on James's use of Elijah includes helpful observations on James's understanding of prayer.

Bauckham (2019) provides a particularly helpful model by comparing James to the second-century BCE Jewish sage, Jesus Ben Sira. By considering Ben Sira's explanation of his own approach as a teacher of wisdom in Sirach 33:16–17 and 39:1–2, 6, Bauckham (2019) concludes:

[S]ince the role of a sage is to express as his own wisdom in his own formulation the wisdom he has gained from his intensive study of the tradition, Ben Sira transmits and develops the tradition without simply repeating it. (pp. 13–14)

Bauckham (2019) proposes that James exemplifies the same approach in his use of the Jesus tradition (and the same applies to his use of the Jewish wisdom tradition):

Rather than thinking in terms of allusion, which makes verbal correspondence the center of attention, we can think of James as a sage who has made the wisdom of Jesus his own. He does not repeat it; he is inspired by it. (p. 14)

Allison (2013) agrees with this assessment:

James consistently interacts with a large network of authoritative texts. [...] The upshot is an implicit claim faithfully to represent and reinscribe the divine revelation in the Jewish Scriptures. (p. 52)<sup>193</sup>

The implication for understanding James's use of the Jewish Scriptures and the Jesus tradition is that these sources are very helpful in elucidating James's thought, even where there is no direct quotation from or identifiable allusion to the sources. It is to be expected that James will apply the tradition pertinently to his readers, but that application will be faithful to the tradition.

## ■ James 1:5–8

### ■ Context

James's first passage dealing with prayer occupies the second section (Ja 1:5–8) of his opening exhortation (Ja 1:2–8). The whole exhortation forms a rhetorical unit bound together by the device known as *gradatio*, in which successive phrases are joined by the use of repeated linking words. In this passage, the links are more than cosmetic, and they point to a thematic unity (Allison 2013, pp. 138–139; Martin 1988, p. 13; cf. 2 Pt 1:5–8). It is thus the nature of the trials and the response required towards them (vv. 2–4) which provide the motivation for the prayer that is contemplated in Verses 5–8.

There is some debate regarding the nature of the trials: for example, whether they are inward or outward, or whether they relate to some specific

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193. See also Mason (2019, pp. 29–31).



situation in which the readers were involved. Moo (2000, pp. 53–54) rightly notes that the use of *περιπίπτω* [‘meet’ or ‘encounter’] in connection with the trials points to external circumstances (*pace* Adamson 1976, p. 53). Furthermore, the qualification of the trials with the adjective *ποικίλος* (emphasising the varied nature of the trials) indicates that the author did not wish to be too specific regarding their nature. They would, no doubt, have included persecution or oppression (cf. Ja 2:1–7; 5:1–6), but need not have been limited to that kind of experience (Allison 2013, p. 146; Moo 2000, p. 54).

The significance of the trials is that they constitute a testing of the readers’ faith. The term James uses for ‘testing’ is *δοκίμιον*, a term used in connection with the purification of metals by fire (Ps 11:7 LXX; Pr 27:21 LXX). Given that this process includes both purification and proof of genuineness, James is probably indicating that the trials that had befallen his readers were both proving and purifying their faith (cf. Allison 2013, pp. 150–151; Moo 2000, pp. 54–55).

While trials by their nature are painful rather than enjoyable, James exhorts his readers to rejoice in them because they produce endurance [*ὑπομονή*]. This endurance, in turn, must be allowed to ‘have its perfect work’ [*ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ ἔργον τέλειον ἔχεται*] so that the readers may be ‘perfect and complete, lacking in nothing’ [*ἵνα ᾗτε τέλειοι καὶ ὀλόκληροι ἐν μηδενὶ λειπόμενοι*] (v. 4). Commentators are generally agreed that the perfection spoken of here is the perfection of a character which is complete in all the virtues required of a righteous person. Furthermore, recognising the link between James and the Sermon on the Mount, this perfection can be related to the character of God, whom disciples are instructed to emulate in Matthew 5:48. As Moo (2000, p. 56) expresses it, what is in view here is ‘a character that lacks nothing in the panoply of virtues that define God’s character’. In a similar vein, Davids (1982, p. 70) speaks of ‘a fully rounded uprightness, an approach toward the character of God or an imitation of Christ’. In the context of James 1:2–8, another important aspect of this perfection is reflected in the Septuagint (LXX) use of *τέλειος* to describe an undivided heart that is fully devoted to God (Dt 18:13; 1 Ki 8:61; 11:4; 15:3, 14; Allison 2013, p. 155).

Further insight into the trials and their intended effect is found in James 1:12–15. In these verses, James picks up the idea of ‘trials’ [*πειρασμοῖς*] from Verse 3 to highlight a correct response to temptation. When tempted [*πειραζόμενος*], no one should say, ‘I am being tempted [*πειράζομαι*] by God’ (v. 13). Rather, one should endure the trial (*υπομένει πειρασμόν*, v. 12) and avoid giving in to desire and falling into sin (vv. 14–15). The link between the noun ‘trials’ [*πειρασμοί*] (v. 2) and the verb ‘tempt’ [*πειράζω*] in this passage shows that trials may bring temptation to sin and that endurance of such

trials involves resisting such temptations. This is surely an aspect of the perfection envisaged in Verse 4.

Thus, in his opening paragraph, James challenges his readers to take a counter-intuitive view of their trials. Instead of regarding them with fear and distaste, they should view the trials positively because of their sanctifying effect. Instead of viewing the trials as a source of pain and loss, they should be welcomed because they produce endurance, which ultimately leads to the perfecting of the believer's character. The exhortations that follow throughout the letter show that the readers' trials could be intensely painful, and this reality raises the question of how they could find the strength to consider them 'nothing but joy' (v. 2; NRSV). That is the question which is addressed by the exhortations relating to prayer in Verses 5-8.

## ■ What kinds of prayer are envisaged in this passage?

In response to the challenge of responding correctly to trials, James encourages his readers to ask for wisdom and discusses the correct approach to such praying. In this way, the letter's first discussion of prayer is introduced.

On the question of what kinds of prayer are envisaged in this passage, it may immediately be noted that James urges those who lack wisdom to ask God to supply their needs. Moo (2000, p. 60) does claim that the passage may be taken to apply to any prayer. His reasoning is that 'James does not return to the topic of wisdom in vv. 6-8, and his teaching here finds parallels in other NT [New Testament] texts about prayer in general' (Moo 200, p. 60). However, it will be seen in the discussion below that the idea of wisdom is closely related to the discussion of Verses 6-8. There is also a significant difference in the way James addresses prayer in this passage compared with his discussion of prayer in James 4:1-3, where more general requests seem to be in mind. There is, therefore, no reason to assume that James was thinking of prayer in any broader sense in this passage, and it is better, in seeking to elucidate James's understanding of prayer, to limit the scope of prayer in the present passage to the need for wisdom.

There is an important connection between wisdom and the character that results from endurance through trials. As James notes in 3:17-18, the wisdom that comes from God is 'first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere'.<sup>194</sup> It produces a

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194. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the ESV.

'harvest of righteousness'. Such a description accords well with the idea of a character which is perfect and complete, lacking nothing (Ja 1:4). Furthermore, the endurance required in response to the trials and temptations of James 1:12–15 is also related to wisdom: whereas people are led away by their own desire (Ja 1:14), every perfect gift comes from above (Ja 1:17; cf. Ja 3:17). In all probability this is a reference to wisdom from God which enables a person to resist temptation (Davids 1982, p. 52). Thus the prayer for wisdom is directly related to the need for divine power to respond to trials in such a way as to bring about the character growth envisaged in James 1:2–4.

It is frequently noted that James's view of wisdom as coming from above (Ja 3:17) shares the understanding of wisdom which is found in the wisdom literature of the OT (Allison 2013, p. 170; Martin 1988, p. 17; Moo 2000, p. 57). This is a point that needs to be emphasised. Job 28 is a lengthy poem that dramatises the futility of seeking wisdom from any source other than God:

From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? [...] God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens. [...] he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. (vv. 20, 23, 24, 27)

Similarly, the book of Proverbs asserts, 'For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding' (Pr 2:6). This wisdom watches over and guards its possessors; it delivers them from the temptations posed by people of perverse speech and from the adulteress (Pr 2:11–16). It also makes the path of the righteous to be 'like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day' (Pr 4:18). These perspectives shed much light on James's understanding of wisdom and its importance for believers who were experiencing trials of many kinds.

## ■ What attitude is required of those who come to God in prayer?

Having exhorted his readers to ask God for wisdom, James devotes significant attention to the attitude with which they should make their requests. The required attitude is summed up in the command, 'But let him ask in faith, with no doubting' [αἰτείτω δὲ ἐν πίστει μηδὲν διακρινόμενος] (Ja 1:6). In context, the doubt would refer in the first place to doubting the character of God. As noted by Grottenberg (2019):

'[F]aith' refers to a kind of deep trust that, for James, is placed in God's identity and ability to act in the world, rather than in the thing one is asking for. This is not to be confused with the expectation of a particular outcome, but is to be understood as robust confidence in God's character. (p. 14)

God is described as one who gives to all unreservedly [ἀπλῶς] and without reproach [μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος] (v. 5). Although most English Bible translations render ἀπλῶς as ‘generously’ (e.g. NRSV, ESV, NIV and KJV), it is more likely that the word has the sense ‘unreservedly’, indicating that God’s giving of wisdom is without hesitation or divided intent (Allison 2013, p. 172; Davids 1982, pp. 72–73; Moo 2000, pp. 58–59). This interpretation also provides a contrast between God and the doubter described in Verses 6–8 and sets God forth as a model of single-mindedness.

The danger of doubt when praying for wisdom is further elaborated in James 1:6b–8. The one who doubts is ‘like a wave of the sea [...] unstable in all his ways’. This shows that the doubt is not a mere uncertainty regarding God’s willingness to grant wisdom; there is a more profound problem – a moral problem – with this doubting attitude. The key is partly given in the statement that the doubter is unstable *in all his ways*. Here James uses the motif of the ‘two ways’, common in Jewish and Christian moral exhortation.<sup>195</sup> In doing so he recalls an important theme from the wisdom literature, and it is worth noting some important connections with this tradition.

Proverbs 2 has already emerged in the discussion above as an important passage in which wisdom is said to come from God and to protect one from temptation. The ‘two ways’ motif is also prominent in this chapter: God is said to watch over ‘the way of his saints’; wisdom delivers ‘from the way of evil, from men [...] who [...] walk in the ways of darkness [...] who are devious in their ways’; and wisdom leads one to ‘walk in the way of the good’ (Pr 2:8, 12–13, 15, 20). The stark contrast between the two ways is also emphasised by the urgency of the exhortation in the opening verses of Proverbs 2 as the young man is instructed to be ‘attentive to wisdom’, to ‘call out for insight’ and to ‘seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures’ (Pr 2:2–4). The result of such an urgent quest is assured with the promise, ‘then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God’ (Pr 2:5). As in James 1:5, there is a statement about God’s willingness to give: ‘For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright’ (Pr 2:6–7).

These exhortations and promises provide helpful insight into James’s understanding of the prayer for wisdom. God’s gift of wisdom is assured to those who ask for it in faith, without doubting. Such prayer must include a heartfelt desire to walk in the ways that are pleasing to God. By contrast, the one who doubts not only fails to recognise God’s gracious and merciful character but also falls under the condemnation of being a

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195. See Lockett (2008) for a discussion of James’s use of the ‘two ways’ motif. See McKenna (1981) for a more complete discussion of the motif in Jewish and Christian writings of the Graeco-Roman period.

‘double-minded man’ [ἀνήρ δίψυχος] (Ja 1:8). The Greek word δίψυχος is not attested before James and is related to the Hebrew term לב ולב, meaning ‘double heart’ (Allison 2013, pp. 186–190). Double-mindedness (which amounts to double-heartedness) thus contradicts the most basic element of biblical piety, which is single-hearted devotion to God. The latter is expressed most notably in the *Shema* (Dt 6:5), but also in numerous other passages (e.g. Dt 10:12–20; 1 Ki 18:21; Ps 11:3; 86:11; 119:13). Such single-hearted devotion was one of James’s primary concerns (see e.g. Ja 4:4, 8),<sup>196</sup> and it is not surprising to find him denying categorically that the one who doubts, the one who is double-minded, will not receive wisdom from God. Such doubt and double-mindedness are equivalent to being uncertain in one’s commitment to knowing and doing the will of God.

To sum up, the attitude required of one who prays for wisdom is a wholehearted longing to know God’s will combined with a confidence that God will grant both an understanding of his will and the power to obey, expressed in the ability to endure through the midst of trials.

## ■ How certain can one be of receiving from God that which is requested in prayer?

In relation to the prayer for wisdom, James gives both a categorical assurance and a categorical denial. There is, in the first place, an affirmation that wisdom will be given to the one who asks for it in faith (Ja 1:5). Although James does not elaborate on this assurance, the sources on which he draws do provide insight into his thinking. In the first place, Proverbs 2, which has so many connections with the present passage, gives repeated and definite affirmations of success in the quest for wisdom: ‘you will understand the fear of the Lord [...] you will understand righteousness and justice [...] wisdom will come into your heart’ (Pr 2:5, 9, 10). Secondly, in addition to the link with Matthew 7:7, 11, the present passage has links with Matthew 21:21–22 (parallel Mk 11:22–24), where Jesus assures his disciples of the success of their prayers if they are offered in faith:<sup>197</sup>

[/]f you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea’, it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith. (Mt 21:21–22)

Thus, James gives his readers every reason to believe that the prayer for wisdom will be granted if it is offered in faith – where faith is understood as a confidence in the character of God and a commitment to walk in his ways.

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196. Cf. Moo (2000, p. 46): ‘Spiritual “wholeness”, then, we suggest, is the central concern of the letter’.

197. Bauckham (2019, pp. 16–17).

On the other hand, James asserts in the strongest terms that the double-minded man will not receive anything from the Lord (Ja 1:7). This person is not single-minded (or single-hearted) in his devotion to God; he is not wholeheartedly committed to seeking wisdom and is therefore lukewarm in his commitment to obeying God and to developing the complete, perfect character which is an imitation of God himself. This kind of double-mindedness is the opposite of faith. It is a disinterest in God, an indifference to his will and his ways. It is, in fact, the rejection of wisdom, and it is therefore unthinkable that the double-minded person should receive wisdom from God.

## ■ James 4:2-3

### ■ Context

Discerning a structure in the Letter of James is one of the widely-recognised challenges of the epistle.<sup>198</sup> Regarding the context of James 4:1-3, commentators differ on whether a new major division should begin at James 3:13 (e.g. Moo 2000, pp. 167, 179) or James 4:1 (Allison 2013; p. 593 Davids 1982, p. 27-28), and whether the section begun in Verse 1 should end at James 4:3 (Moo 2000, p. 167), James 4:10 (Davids 1982, p. 155) or James 4:12 (Allison 2013, p. 593). As Allison (2013, p. 592) notes, 'The widespread disagreement regarding the structure of this passage shows that, if James had a clear plan in mind, he failed to communicate it'. For the present purposes, it is sufficient to note that the theme of community conflict is prominent throughout the section from James 3:13 to James 4:10, and this whole section will be considered as the context of James's second discussion of prayer in James 4:2-3.

In James 3:13-18 it appears that certain members of the community were causing division through their 'bitter jealousy and selfish ambition' (Ja 3:14). It may also be that these members were claiming to possess wisdom, and this may have been related to a quest for leadership in the community (cf. Ja 3:1). James's response is to urge them to seek the wisdom that comes from above, wisdom which is pure and peaceable and which promotes harmony in the community.

In James 4:1-10, the problem of strife in the community intensifies. This conflict is reflected in the use of words relating to war and battle [πόλεμος,

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198. See Taylor (2004) for a discussion of recent shifts in scholarly consensus, from Dibelius's view that the letter has no unifying structure (Dibelius & Greeven 1976, pp. 1-11), to attempts to find a detailed structure in the letter (e.g. Davids 1982, pp. 22-28; Penner 1996, pp. 121-213), to the view that the letter reflects a 'coherence of thought', even if it was not composed with an elaborate and deliberate structure (Taylor 2004, pp. 106-107). The last-mentioned view is reflected in commentators such as Allison (2013, pp. 76-81), Bauckham (1999, pp. 63-66) and Moo (2000, pp. 43-46).

μάχη, στρατεύομαι, πολεμέω]. The crux of the problem, as far as behaviour in the community was concerned, is expressed in the parallel phrases of Verses 2–3. The structure and punctuation have been disputed, with essentially two options being proposed. Davids (1982, pp.157-158), using the usual punctuation of the Greek text, proposes a chiasmic structure as shown in Box 9.1.

**BOX 9.1:** Davids’s chiasmic structuring of James 4:2–3 using the usual punctuation of the Greek text.

<b>a</b> ἐπιθυμεῖτε	You desire
καὶ οὐκ ἔχετε	and do not have;
<b>b</b> φονεύετε (?) καὶ ζηλοῦτε	you murder (?) and envy
καὶ οὐ δύνασθε ἐπιτυχεῖν,	and are unable to obtain;
<b>b'</b> μάχεσθε καὶ πολεμεῖτε	you fight and war,
[καὶ] οὐκ ἔχετε διὰ τὸ μὴ αἰτεῖσθαι ὑμᾶς	[and] do not have because you do not ask;
<b>a'</b> αἰτεῖτε	you ask
καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε διότι κακῶς αἰτεῖσθε,	and do not receive because you ask
ἵνα ἐν ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ὑμῶν δαπανήσητε.	wrongly, to spend on your pleasures. <sup>199</sup>

Source: Authors’ own work, adapted from Davids (1982, pp. 157–158).

A more common proposal is to modify the punctuation of the Greek text to give a structure that reflects the parallelism of desire/unfulfilled desire as seen in Box 9.2 (Hort 1909, p. 89; Mayor 1913, pp. 130–131; Moo 2000, pp. 182–183 and most modern English translations):

**BOX 9.2:** A more common proposal for the structure of James 4:2–3 using a modified punctuation of the Greek text.

ἐπιθυμεῖτε καὶ οὐκ ἔχετε·	You desire and do not have,
φονεύετε (?).	so you murder (?).
καὶ ζηλοῦτε, καὶ οὐ δύνασθε ἐπιτυχεῖν·	You covet and cannot obtain,
μάχεσθε καὶ πολεμεῖτε.	so you fight and war.
οὐκ ἔχετε διὰ τὸ μὴ αἰτεῖσθαι ὑμᾶς.	You do not have because you do not ask.
αἰτεῖτε καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε διότι κακῶς αἰτεῖσθε, ἵνα ἐν ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ὑμῶν δαπανήσητε.	You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, to spend on your pleasures. <sup>200</sup>

Source: Authors’ own work.

The second proposal makes better sense of the text inasmuch as it allows the final two clauses to provide an answer to the problem posed in the first two clauses: the reason for not receiving is that God has not been asked,

199. Own translation.

200. Translation adapted from ESV.

and if he has been asked, it has been with the wrong motives. This development of thought provides the rationale for the rebuke that begins in Verse 4. The first structure is less likely for two reasons: (1) it requires the bracketed *καὶ*, which is missing from most manuscripts (as Davids [1982, p. 158] notes); and (2) it loses any sense of a development of thought around the problem of desiring and not receiving.

One of the most challenging problems in this passage is the presence of the word *φονεύετε* [murder]. It is immediately evident that the actual crime of murder is almost unimaginable in a Christian community, and scholars have struggled to provide an explanation for James's use of the word here, including the metaphorical use of murder, biblical traditions like Cain's murder of Abel and Ahab's murder of Naboth, and Christian warnings against murder (1 Pt 4:15) (Davids 1982, p. 158). Martin (1988, p. 146) proposes a literal understanding on the basis that 'the Letter of James was most likely written in a period when murder was accepted as a "religious" way to solve disagreements' and that James may have been associated with priests of Jerusalem who had Zealot sympathies. Moo (2000, p. 184) interprets murder as a hypothetical eventuality.

Ultimately, none of these proposals carries conviction. From a rhetorical perspective, it would be clumsy, to say the least, to use 'murder' in a metaphorical sense before *ζηλώω* ['covet' or 'envy'], and James was not rhetorically clumsy (Mayor 1913, p. 130). The idea that James viewed murder only as a hypothetical possibility is contradicted by the plain sense of the text, which speaks of murder, fighting and war as practices actually occurring in the community. For this reason, many interpreters – including Tyndale, Calvin, Beza and others – have followed Erasmus's proposal that *φονεύετε* be amended to *φθονεῖτε*, meaning 'to experience strong envy and resentment against someone – "to be jealous, to be envious"' (Louw & Nida 1996, §88.163). Although there is no direct textual evidence for this reading, and emending the text in the absence of textual evidence is usually ill-advised, a good case can be made for accepting the emendation in this case, albeit with reluctance.<sup>201</sup> The emendation does provide a good rhetorical flow to the passage when read in conjunction with the second structure outlined.

On this interpretation, James 4:1-3 comes to a climax with the author bringing his readers' unfulfilled desires and their aggressive, competitive attempts to obtain what they desire into the perspective of asking God to supply their needs. Insofar as God fails to supply their needs when they do ask for his help, it is because their motives are wrong. This leads into an extended rebuke of their divided devotion to God (Ja 4:4-5), culminating

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201. See Mayor (1913, pp. 131-132) and Allison (2013, p. 603, n. 70) for further discussion.



in an appeal for repentance and a return to single-minded commitment to him (Ja 4:6–10).

The rebuke of Verses 4–5 begins with the accusation, ‘You adulterous people!’ (lit. ‘adulteresses’ [μοιχαλίδες]). The feminine form of the word evokes the powerful OT imagery of Israel as an unfaithful wife (e.g. Is 1:21; 50:1; Jr 3; Ez 16; 23; Hs 1–3). James then applies this to his readers by accusing them of friendship with the world, where ‘world’ is clearly to be understood in the sense of the world system which stands opposed to God (Arndt et al. 2000, p. 562 §7b; Louw & Nida 1996, §41.38). Such friendship amounts to enmity with God. The appeal to Scripture in Verse 5 poses one of the most difficult problems in NT interpretation. Perhaps the best solution to date comes from Allison (2013, pp. 615–622), who provides a lengthy and complex argument in support of the view that the quotation referred to comes from the lost book of Eldad and Modad. The quotation refers to Joshua’s jealousy of these two men, as recorded in Numbers 11:26–29, and functions in James 4 as a rebuke of jealousy, one of the core problems highlighted in James 3:13–4:3.<sup>202</sup>

James concludes the discussion of strife in the community with a call to repent, beginning with a quotation from Proverbs 3:34, which warns against pride but promises that grace will be given to the humble. This leads into an appeal expressed in ten imperative verbs. Noteworthy for our present purposes are the command to draw near to God (with the associated promise that he will draw near in response), and the commands for sinners to cleanse their hands [καθαρίσατε χεῖρας] and the double-minded [δίψυχος] to purify their hearts [ἀγνίσατε καρδίας].

With these perspectives in mind, the contribution of this passage to James’s understanding of prayer can now be considered.

## ■ What kinds of prayer are envisaged in this passage?

The first consideration relating to James’s perspective on prayer in James 4:1–3 is the kinds of prayer that are envisaged in this passage. The text does not give an explicit answer (as it did in Ja 1:5), and inferences must therefore be made from the context. Insofar as the *Sitz im Leben* of James 3:13–4:10 can be determined, it relates to strife within the community. This may have included a desire for status and leadership positions, as may be implied by James 3:1. Some infer from this that the object of prayer here envisaged is the wisdom that will enable its possessors to become leaders in

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202. Carpenter (2001) proposes that the scriptural reference in James 4:5 is a paraphrase of Proverbs 3:34, which is quoted in James 4:6. However, his arguments are not persuasive.

the community (Martin 1988, p. 147; Moo 2000, p. 184). Although this interpretation seems to connect the prayer of James 4:3 most directly with its context, it breaks down on further examination. Would the people causing strife in the community have been seeking earthly wisdom or the wisdom from above (Ja 3:13-17)? The context makes it clear that they were not seeking the latter, and James would certainly not have advised them to pray for the former.

The passage provides a few clues regarding the content of the prayer envisaged here:

- Those causing strife were driven by passion (ἡδονή, Ja 4:1, 3). The context indicates that passion is understood negatively as a controlling desire.
- The strife in the community was caused by jealousy/envy (ζήλος, ζηλώω, φθονέω – on the emended reading – Ja 3:14, 16; 4:2, 3), indicating that those causing the strife harboured ill-will towards others whom they envied. This implies that they desired what those people had.<sup>203</sup>
- Whatever the author had in mind concerning the asking, it could be misused on the readers' passions (Ja 4:3).

Given these clues and their context, perhaps the most likely object of prayer in the present passage would be not the wisdom that would lead to leadership positions but the leadership positions themselves. However, given the lack of specificity, it would be reasonable to think that James would be willing to apply his comments regarding prayer fairly widely to any need or desire that a person may wish to present to God. In that case, this particular passage provides insight into any prayer that is a request for some provision or assistance from God.

## ■ What attitude is required of those who come to God in prayer?

This passage has much to say regarding the attitude required of those who come to God in prayer. Praying to spend on one's own passions is identified as the wrong motive in Verse 3. This is followed by an extended focus on the readers' relationship with God and, especially, on the problem of divided loyalty (vv. 4-10). The connection between Verse 3 and the following rebuke and call for repentance shows that praying to spend on one's own passions is viewed as an expression of friendship with the world and, thereby, of spiritual adultery and enmity with God. One may gain insight into the seriousness with which James views this behaviour by considering the OT descriptions of Israel and Judah as an adulteress, the image evoked in Verse 4. Ezekiel 23 is particularly noteworthy:

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203. See Louw and Nida (1996, §88.162, 25.21, 88.161) on the meaning of these words.

Oholah played the whore while she was mine, and she lusted after her lovers the Assyrians, warriors clothed in purple, governors and commanders, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. She bestowed her whoring upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them, and she defiled herself with all the idols of everyone after whom she lusted. [...] Her sister Oholibah saw this, and she became more corrupt than her sister in her lust and in her whoring, which was worse than that of her sister. [...] When she carried on her whoring so openly and flaunted her nakedness, I turned in disgust from her, as I had turned in disgust from her sister. Yet she increased her whoring. (vv. 5-7, 11, 18-19)

The call to repentance further highlights the distaste with which James views the readers' worldliness. They are told to resist the devil, suggesting that their behaviour was to some extent influenced by Satan, and they are called *δίψυχος* [double-minded], evoking the warning of James 1:6-8.

In contrast to the attitudes and behaviour which James condemns, he urges the readers to submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, cleanse their hands and purify their hearts (Ja 4:7-8). As was the case in James 1:5-8, he calls upon his readers to approach God in single-hearted devotion as they present their requests to him. Prayer cannot be approached simply as a means of obtaining one's desires without reference to a relationship with God. In James's mind, true prayer demands a recognition of God's lordship and sovereignty, combined with humility, a love for him and a rejection of attitudes and practices which are displeasing to him.

## ■ How certain can one be of receiving from God that which is requested in prayer?

As has been recognised, the present passage contains a definite reflection on the issue of unanswered prayer (Davids 1982, pp. 159-160). It is therefore very helpful for developing an understanding of James's view of prayer, particularly his understanding of God's response to prayer. The author's reference to prayer begins with the assumption that one may approach God to supply one's needs with the expectation that he will indeed do so: 'You do not have because you do not ask' (Ja 4:2). James again has Jesus' words from Matthew 7:7 in mind, as he did in James 1:5-8. However, in the present passage, he is unwilling to simply affirm the positive promise from the saying of Jesus without further comment. As Bauckham (2019, p. 17) notes, wisdom sayings are usually stated in general terms, without qualifications or exceptions. James is happy to appropriate the promise and to affirm its assurance for its readers, but he also finds it necessary, given their circumstances, to discuss important exceptions to the general rule. Specifically, he points out that selfish prayers, especially those based on envy, cannot be answered by God.

James does not wish to deny the reality of God's ability and desire to provide for his people; rather, he is at pains to put prayer into its proper biblical context and to understand it as part of a relationship with the living God. He works from the assumption that the Lord is God in Heaven above and on the earth beneath, and that he calls his people to love him with all their heart, soul and might (cf. Dt 4:39; 6:5). Those who expect God to satisfy their desires for their own selfish ends exalt themselves proudly against God. James reminds them that God opposes the proud (Ja 4:6), and it is therefore unthinkable that he would simply grant their requests – as if the mere utterance of a prayer would cause him to act, irrespective of how the person praying stood in relation to him.

The contribution of this passage to the question of when and whether God will answer prayer is largely negative insofar as it emphasises one of the reasons why God will not grant requests brought before him. However, in addressing this question, James opens up a much deeper perspective on prayer and how prayer is intimately connected to a person's relationship with God.

## ■ James 5:13–18

### ■ Context

Grottenberg (2019, p. 17) has called James 5:13–18 'James' treatise on prayer', and he notes that this passage 'remains the richest part of the letter as it pertains to the topic of prayer'. Questions of structure once again surface at this point in the letter,<sup>204</sup> but there is general agreement that these verses form part of the letter's ending. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the letter both begins (Ja 1:5–8) and ends (Ja 5:13–18) with a focus on prayer, and this indicates that prayer was an important part of the author's thinking regarding the Christian life.

One of the features of James 5:13–20 is the prominence both of healing from disease (see upcoming section) and confession of sin and restoration of the sinner. Although these may appear to be disparate issues, Allison (2011) has shown that the combination of these themes is attested in early Christian tradition<sup>205</sup> and almost certainly has its roots in the LXX, especially Psalm 78:13 (Ps 79:13 in English translations) and Ezekiel 33–34 (note esp. Ezk 34:4,16, 33). When seen in this light, the final verses of James reflect a deep pastoral concern for members of the Christian community, both with regard to their spiritual and their physical needs – needs which should not

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204. See the opening sentence of the sub-section titled 'Context', under the 'James 4:2–3' section.

205. See, for example, 1 Clement 59.4; Polycarp Philippians 6.1.

be unduly separated. It is noteworthy that the only explicit reference to the community's elders in the Letter of James is found in this context.

In view of the fact that prayer for healing is at the heart of James's discussion of prayer in James 5:14–15, it is important to ascertain what kind of illness is in mind. Bowden (2014) provides a survey of interpretative approaches to this passage, which include various combinations of physical or spiritual illness and physical or spiritual healing. However, it is most natural to understand both the illness and the healing as physical (Allison 2013, pp. 765–766; Button 2021, p. 148; Moo 2000, pp. 237, 243). The words used to indicate illness are ἀσθενέω (v. 14) and κάμνω (v. 15), and these are essentially synonymous in the context (Mayor 1913, p. 168). This understanding is confirmed by the combination of σώζω with the participle of κάμνω: the healing work of a doctor was commonly described with these terms (e.g. Philo Decal 12; Sacr 123; Allison 2013, pp. 765–766). The description of the illness and its healing indicate that the sickness envisaged is severe: the one who is sick must call for the elders (he is apparently unable to go to them), and his healing is described as being raised up (ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος, v. 15) confirming the idea that his illness had weakened his body to the point where he was confined to his sick-bed.

Elijah is used as an example to encourage readers in their confidence that God will indeed answer their prayers. The immediate purpose of James's use of Elijah as an illustration is clear enough, but there is a depth of meaning in Elijah's example that must not be overlooked.<sup>206</sup> James's description of Elijah as ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν is significant in light of the valorisation of Elijah in intertestamental literature (e.g. Sir 48:1–11; Kovalishyn 2018, pp. 1033–1036).<sup>207</sup> Given this view of Elijah, James's readers are likely to have seen him as an unattainable example of prophetic greatness. Yet, James emphasises that he had 'the same limitations' as James's readers (Adamson 1976, p. 200; cf. Ac 14:15, the only other place where the word is used in the NT). This provides encouragement and reassurance regarding the efficacy of prayer for James's readers (Davids 1982, p. 197; Mayor 1913, p. 174).

At first sight, it is somewhat surprising that James highlights Elijah's prayer for the cessation and resumption of rain. There is no explicit mention in 1 Kings 17–18 that Elijah prayed for the rain to cease or to return, and it would seem more pertinent to refer either to his prayer for the raising of

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206. Kovalishyn (2018) has provided a helpful survey of the scholarship surrounding James's use of Elijah. She argues that the whole Elijah narrative of 1 Kings 17–18 should be kept in view when interpreting James 5:17–18, and that several aspects of that narrative reinforce essential themes in the Letter of James.

207. Note Sir 48:3 (NRSV): 'How glorious you were, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! Whose glory is equal to yours?'

the widow's son (1 Ki 17:20–22) or his prayer for fire to consume the offering in his contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Ki 18:36–37). The prayer for the widow's son would appear particularly relevant in a context of prayer for healing (cf. Allison 2013, p. 774; Kovalishyn 2018, pp. 1038–1039; Moo 2000, p. 248). One explanation for James's reference to Elijah's prayers for rain is that Jewish tradition did associate Elijah with prayer for rain (2 Es 7:109). Furthermore, Elijah's announcement of drought is associated with his standing before God (1 Ki 17:1) and the onset of rain occurs after he has bowed himself to the ground and put his face between his knees (1 Ki 18:42–45). These two postures, standing and putting one's face between one's knees, are associated with prayer in rabbinic tradition (Allison 2013, pp. 776–777). Yet there is more to be said on this point.

Kovalishyn (2018, pp. 1039–1040) makes a good case for including the entire narrative of 1 Kings 17:1–18:46 in the intertextual interpretation of James's reference to Elijah. Foster (2014, p. 192) also notes, in connection with James's use of Abraham, Rahab, Job and Elijah, that '[i]n naming an exemplar and citing an event an author (or speaker) cannot prevent an audience's collective mind reflecting on the wider story'. As far as James's discussion of prayer in James 5:13–18 is concerned, this perspective provides important insights. Firstly, Elijah's prayer for the raising of the widow's son is not excluded from view. Secondly, Elijah's role in calling the people of Israel back to single-minded covenant faithfulness to God must be regarded as relevant to James's discussion. His passionate appeal was for the people to abandon their double-mindedness: 'How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him' (1 Ki 18:21). After God had answered his prayer for fire, the people responded by reaffirming the *Shema*: 'The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God' (1 Ki 18:39). The event on Mount Carmel thus resulted in a renewal of the covenant, opening the way for God's promised blessing of rain (Lv 26:4, 19; Dt 11:13–17; 28:12, 23–24; cf. Kovalishyn 2018, pp. 1028–1032).

## ■ What kinds of prayer are envisaged in this passage?

In considering the kinds of prayer envisaged in James 5:13–18 it is useful to note the words used in relation to prayer. Whereas the only word used for prayer in the two passages discussed above (Ja 1:5–8; 4:1–3) is αἰτέω [ask], the present passage does not use this word at all. Instead, the verb-noun pairs προσεύχομαι/προσευχή and εὔχομαι/εὐχή are used, along with the noun δέησις. In addition, the word ψάλλω should be noticed. There is no significant difference between the simple εὔχομαι/εὐχή and the compound προσεύχομαι/προσευχή: all these words denote speaking to and making requests of God (Louw & Nida 1996, §37.178). In James, their meaning is largely equivalent

to αἰτέω. However, αἰτέω does create a definite connection with passages from the gospels, as has been noticed above. In context, δέησις is close in meaning to the other four words for prayer, but indicates an urgent request (Louw & Nida 1996, §33.171). These words together indicate that James's main focus in James 5:13–18 was on requests made to God, but the presence of ψάλλω [sing songs of praise] (Louw & Nida 1996, §33.111) shows that he also expected the congregation to address God in praise.

James 5:13–18 includes a number of references to prayer, understood as presenting requests to God. Although prayer for healing is central to the passage, James's treatment of prayer is broader than that.<sup>208</sup> The passage opens by encouraging anyone who is suffering to pray (v. 13). The verb translated 'suffering' is κακοπαθέω.<sup>209</sup> The noun form of this word is used in Verse 10 to describe the suffering of the prophets, and it may be inferred that James was thinking specifically of suffering for the faith (cf. the use of the noun and verb in 2 Tm 2:9; 4:5). However, a more general type of suffering is probably in mind (Moo 2000, p. 235). In response, the suffering believer is instructed to pray. Although the specific nature of the prayer (or request to God) is not mentioned, the instructions from the letter-opening (Ja 1:5–8) certainly suggest that James expected such prayer to include a request for wisdom and strength to endure. In the light of James 5:14–18 it would also be reasonable to think that James expected suffering Christians to pray for deliverance from their distresses.

The second type of prayer (as distinct from praise) envisaged in this passage is prayer in response to illness (v. 14). This prayer is offered by the elders of the church on behalf of the sick person who has called them to come and pray for him. The use of anointing oil indicates that this is a more or less formal act by the leaders of the church.<sup>210</sup> The expected result of the prayer is that the sick person will be healed (v. 15), and this implies that the elders are to pray for the person's healing. However, alongside the Lord raising up the sick person, Verse 15 states, 'And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven'. This suggests that the elders' prayer would have included a prayer for forgiveness in the event that the sick person had committed sin and had confessed that sin to the elders (though this is not stated explicitly). The close relationship between healing and the restoration of the sinner in early Christian tradition shows that these two concerns were regarded as important aspects of pastoral care (Allison 2011). In Verse 16, the

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208. Cf. Moo (2000, p. 234): 'Prayer is clearly the topic of this paragraph, being mentioned in every verse. James commends it to the individual believer, in the very different kinds of circumstances that he may face (vv. 13–14), and to the community as well (v. 16a)'.

209. '[T]o suffer physical pain, hardship and distress' (Louw & Nida 1996, §24.89).

210. The oil is sacramental or symbolic, not medicinal (Moo 2000, pp. 238–242).

responsibility of prayer is extended from the elders to the whole congregation: ‘pray for one another’. The particle οὖν links Verse 16 to Verse 15, and the clause ὅπως ἰαθῆτε shows that the focus of the prayer is still on healing from illness.<sup>211</sup>

James’s exhortations with respect to prayer are brought to a conclusion with the statement, ‘The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective’ (v. 16; NRSV). This is a general statement on the efficacy of prayer, which James applies to the prayer issues that he has mentioned. Most immediately, this would apply to the prayer for healing, but it would also relate to the prayer of one who is suffering (v. 13). The assertion of Verse 16 is followed by the example of Elijah in which attention is drawn to his prayer for rain. As noted above, the example of Elijah should be read with the whole of 1 Kings 17–18 in view, and this includes the prophet’s prayers for the raising of the widow’s son (1 Ki 17:20–21), and for God to reveal himself and bring Israel to repentance by sending fire to consume the offering (1 Ki 18:36–38).

The general statement about prayer and the example of Elijah do not change the focus of the present passage, but they do provide insight into James’s broader understanding of prayer. It is fair to say that James expected believers to bring a variety of requests to God (cf. 1:5–8; 4:2–3), and the way he presents Elijah as an example – with the emphasis that he was ὁμοιοπαθής to the readers – would have encouraged them to come before God in relation to any of their needs.

## ■ What attitude is required of those who come to God in prayer?

James’s final ‘treatise on prayer’ recapitulates some of the earlier emphases regarding the attitude toward prayer and adds another. The previous emphasis on praying in faith (Ja 1:6) is repeated in James 5:15, and it may be assumed that James is again thinking of confidence in the character of God (cf. Ja 1:5). The emphasis on repentance, purification and cleansing (Ja 4:6–8) is found again in the close association of confession of sin with prayer for healing (Ja 5:15–16). Likewise, it is the prayer of a *righteous person* which has great power (v. 16). This emphasis is powerfully highlighted in the example of Elijah: the withholding and giving of rain point to the dramatic repentance of the people and the renewal of the covenant at Mount Carmel. Furthermore, Elijah’s prayer and the people’s words in 1 Kings 18:37, 39 recall the *Shema* and remind James’s readers of the need

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211. In Philo *Decal* 12 and *Sacr* 123, healing (expressed by the combination of σώζω and the participle of κάμνω) is linked to ἰατρικός/ἰατρός. Davids (1982, p. 195) notes that ἰάομαι always refers to physical healing in the New Testament.



to put aside double-mindedness as they come before God in prayer (Ja 1:6–8; 4:8).

In addition to these emphases, James 5:16–17 calls for earnestness in prayer. It has been noted above that the word *δέησις* used in the affirmation at the end of Verse 16 denotes an urgent request, and Elijah's praying is described with the cognate noun and verb: *προσευχῇ προσηύξατο*. This construction provides emphasis: 'Elijah did not just pray, he prayed with earnest force' (Allison 2013, p. 776). James is surely not suggesting that the earnestness of the prayer is efficacious in itself, but earnestness is necessary as an indication of single-mindedness (cf. Pr 2:1–4).

## ■ How certain can one be of receiving from God that which is requested in prayer?

It is interesting to note that, whereas James's first two passages on prayer reflect at some length on the problem of unanswered prayer, this final passage is concerned only with assuring the readers that their prayers will be answered. In Verse 15, the elders' prayer of faith 'will save [heal] the one who is sick'. Lest anyone conclude that the act of prayer has efficacy in and of itself, James adds, 'the Lord will raise him up'. In this way, he reminds his readers that prayer and its positive results are part of a living relationship between God and his people. The encouragement for members of the community to pray for one another (v. 16) is also intended to encourage confidence in God's willingness to grant the requests offered to him. The fact that such prayer could be offered by anyone in the community also shows that the efficacy of prayer was not tied to the elders' leadership role, or to any special gifting of individuals within the community. The affirmation at the end of Verse 16 brings the assurances of the previous verses to a climax [*πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις*] and this is reinforced by the example of Elijah. As noted above, James stresses his shared humanity in contrast to the received view of his prophetic greatness. Thus, his mighty exploits in prayer are not merely a redemptive-historical wonder but a paradigm for any believer who comes to God in single-minded faith, devotion and earnestness.

The obvious question that presses itself in response to these powerful assurances is this: did James intend to promise that every prayer for a sick person would result in healing? There are at least three reasons to believe that this was not his intention. Firstly, James's opening discussion of prayer focuses on trials of various kinds; it is unlikely that he would have excluded sickness from such trials, and the believer's first concern in response is to be for perseverance leading to a complete character; the removal of the trial is not the primary concern. Secondly, the whole Letter of James is written with a very strong eschatological perspective in which present

suffering will give way to perfection at the eschaton (Ja 1:12; 5:7-11). The expectation that all diseases will be healed in the present age represents an over-realised eschatology uncharacteristic of James. Thirdly, it was not the universal experience of the NT church that all diseases were healed (Phil 2:27-30), and it is unlikely that James would have wanted to deny this.

How, then, should these assurances be understood? Rather than interpreting James's statements as absolute promises that are guaranteed in each and every situation, it is best to observe that the OT as well as the gospel tradition include both qualified and unqualified statements with respect to the efficacy of prayer (e.g. Ps 34:15-17 versus Is 59:2; Mt 7:7-11; Jn 15:7 versus 1 Jn 5:14) (Davids 1982, p. 159). As Davids (1982, p. 160; [*emphasis in original*]) notes, 'the unqualified form simply encourages one to trust God and depend on him, while the qualified form tells one *how* to pray and corrects abuses'. The assurances of James 5:13-18 are intended to encourage the readers to trust God and to be confident in his fatherly care.

## ■ Conclusion

When the Letter of James is considered for its contribution to a Biblical Theology of prayer, it is found that it contains no significant teaching on prayer that is not found elsewhere in Scripture. However, James's selection of certain aspects of the broader biblical teaching on prayer highlight key aspects of a Biblical Theology of prayer in a particularly practical way. In this respect, James's teaching on prayer falls squarely into the pattern of a wisdom teacher who has thought deeply about the traditions he has received and who then applies them with freshness to his own audience (see above on James's relation to the Jewish Scriptures and the Jesus tradition). Five key aspects of James's theology of prayer emerge from the above exegetical analyses.

Firstly, prayer is to be understood as a central aspect of the believer's relationship with God and an important activity in living out the life of faith. In both joy and suffering (Ja 5:13), believers are to address themselves to God, thus recognising his sovereignty over their circumstances and his involvement in their lives. In times of trial, one is to recognise that God's concern is to develop one's character to maturity and completeness in imitation of his own character (Ja 1:2-4). Prayer plays a vital role as a means of gaining that divine wisdom which will enable one to endure in the trial and to produce the fruit which God desires (Ja 1:5-8).

Secondly, prayer is inseparable from a life of single-minded devotion to God. In all three of James's passages on prayer, double-mindedness is strongly condemned – explicitly in James 1:5-8 and 4:1-8 and implicitly through the example of Elijah (Ja 5:17-18). In light of this emphasis, prayer

can never be viewed as a form of 'supernatural consumerism' (Grottenberg 2019, p. 20).

Thirdly, believers are encouraged to trust in God for all their needs, including their physical well-being (Ja 5:14-16), their need for forgiveness (Ja 5:14-16), their need for sanctifying grace (Ja 1:5-8), or needs of a more unspecified nature (Ja 4:2-3). God gives unreservedly and without finding fault (Ja 1:5). The example of Elijah demonstrates his willingness to answer prayer, and this gift is available to all believers, not only to mighty men and women of God. It is to be understood that prayer makes a definite difference to one's life and circumstances, and the prayer of faith is an expression of trust in God's love, power and willingness to help his people. Earnestness in prayer is also an expression of this trust in God.

Fourthly, James sheds important light on the problem of unanswered prayer. As long as prayer is seen from a transactional perspective – a form of supernatural consumerism – there may seem to be a contradiction between the positive promises associated with prayer and the reality of unanswered prayer. But if prayer is understood as a relational activity between the believer and God, the contradictions recede. Rather than being a means of manipulating supernatural powers, praying in faith is an expression of confidence in the character of God, who loves his people and draws near to them in mercy. Unanswered prayer is no longer a conundrum, because every request is brought within the framework of a relationship between God and his people in which they love him with all their heart. Requests that violate the essence of this relationship cannot be granted by God because they contradict the very purpose of prayer, which is to empower God's people to live in a relationship with him and to grow in single-minded devotion to him.

Fifthly, prayer, for James, is a communal as well as an individual activity. Both at the level of formal pastoral care and at the level of more informal mutual care between members of the community, prayer is to play a central role in the way believers care for and support one another.

# Prayer in 1 Peter, 2 Peter and Jude

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## ■ Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine several passages in the letters ascribed to Peter and Jude which relate to the topic of prayer and worship.

The authorship of these letters has been a matter of scholarly disagreement. I do not have space to discuss the issues here, although I am convinced that there are good reasons to affirm the historic positions on authorship of the various documents (Blomberg, Seal & Duprée 2021, pp. 647–650, 683–684, 697–699). I will refer to the authors as ‘Peter’ and ‘Jude’, in accordance with the explicit testimony of the letters themselves and also in keeping with widely accepted tradition, while recognising the vigorous scholarly disagreements.

As is appropriate in a work of Biblical Theology, I approach these documents as part of the canon of Christian Scripture, and so I interpret them not simply as independent historical documents but in light of the

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totality of Scripture composed of both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). As other colleagues have devoted careful attention to analysis of other parts of the biblical canon, I will not attempt to reproduce such discussions in my chapter.

## ■ Definition

For the purposes of this paper, I adopt the following definition of prayer (Spear 1992):

Prayer is human speech addressed to God. It arises from a consciousness of the relation in which one stands to God and expresses the emotions, desires, and needs stemming from that consciousness. It includes adoration, thanksgiving, confession of sin, submission, commitment, and petition. (p. 285)

Neither Peter nor Jude provides any definition of prayer or any discussion of the theology of prayer. The comments in these documents assume a shared understanding with the readers that prayer is both possible and important, doubtless based on the significant emphasis on prayer in the Jewish Scriptures and other Jewish writings (Finkel 2001, pp. 43–65; Millar 2016, pp. 19–166; Seitz 2001, pp. 3–22; Shuller 2001, pp. 66–88). It is not possible to distinguish clearly between ‘prayer’ and ‘worship’, as both are addressed to God. It is also difficult, in certain cases, to distinguish between ‘prayer’ (directed towards God) and ‘testimony’ (directed towards other people) (Michaels 2001, p. 241).

## ■ Prayer in Peter and Jude in recent scholarship

Several studies have devoted significant attention to the topic of prayer in the NT in the last 25 years, including O Cullmann’s *Prayer in the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 1995), a collection of essays edited by RN Longenecker (*Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2001), D Crump’s *Knocking on Heaven’s Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Baker Academic, 2006) and G Millar’s *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer* (InterVarsity Press, 2016).

In each case, only brief remarks on the letters of Peter and Jude are included in these books. In fact, Cullmann (1999, p. 113) includes only one short paragraph on 1 Peter and does not include any reference to 2 Peter or Jude at all, while Michaels (2001) includes a discussion of 1 Peter (pp. 240–244) and Jude (pp. 248–250), but nothing on 2 Peter. These works, generally, do not consider the letters of Peter and Jude to make a significant contribution to the biblical presentation of prayer, although

Crump does devote more space to certain texts from 1 Peter (2006, pp. 261–262, 268–269). For example, Millar (2016) comments:

Before I come to the writings of John, for the sake of completeness I should say a word about the letters of Peter and Jude, both of which make only passing reference to prayer. (p. 224)

While this is technically true, we will see that these letters include material relating to prayer and worship that is worthy of careful attention.

## ■ Theological context

As Spear's definition of prayer indicates, prayer 'arises from a consciousness of the relation in which one stands to God'. It is necessary, therefore, to consider some key theological assumptions found in the letters of Peter and Jude.

Firstly, 1 Peter 1:3–5, a declaration of praise implicitly directed towards God and therefore one of the texts relevant to our discussion of prayer, also provides a relatively full statement of the theological framework in which all prayer is offered. This is not to say that these verses state every theological conviction that is relevant to the author's understanding of prayer, nor that each biblical author would necessarily express their theological framework for prayer in precisely the same terms. But these verses do provide a rich expression of the theological convictions upon which Peter's theology of prayer is based. The text reads (1 Pt 1; NIV):

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in Heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (vv. 3–5)

We may note the following as of particular significance in Peter's theological framework: At the outset, God is addressed as 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The identity of God is bound up with the person of Jesus. In Bauckham's words (2008, p. 32), 'New Testament writers include Jesus in the unique identity of the one God'. As often in the NT, Jesus is identified with the threefold address, 'Lord Jesus Christ', which indicates the particular theological confession that is made with respect to Jesus (Hurtado 1997, p. 178; see also Hurtado 2003). It is as 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' that God is addressed and blessed. The opening clause is identical to that found in 2 Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:3 (Davids 1990, p. 51) and thus appears to be a standard form of language that might be used by different authors (Kelly 1969, p. 47). The common language does not require the conclusion that Peter depends on the usage in Paul's Letters (Achtmeier 1996, p. 93).

Peter ascribes agency to God in this benediction. God has accomplished several outcomes. These have been done ‘according to his great mercy’. God is thus praised not only for his actions but also for his attributes.

At the outset, Peter declares that God has given us ‘new birth’. The aorist participle of the verb ἀναγεννάω is one of two occurrences of the verb in the NT, the other being in 1 Peter 1:23 (Elliott 2008, p. 331). While this particular term is rare, the image of rebirth is used elsewhere, notably in the Johannine writings (see Jn 3:3, 7–8; 1 Jn 2:29; 5:1–4, 18). This indicates a new relationship with God based on spiritual transformation. The nature of this new experience is described using three prepositional phrases with εἰς (Schreiner 2003, p. 61). Jobes (2005, p. 84) notes that there is some disagreement among scholars regarding the precise syntactical relationship of these three phrases, but this does not affect our main point regarding their content. Firstly, believers are born again into ‘a living hope’ [εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν]. Secondly, believers enter an inheritance, the character of which is expressed by the use of three negative adjectives [εἰς κληρονομίαν ἄφθαρτον καὶ ἀμίαντον καὶ ἀμάραντον]. Thirdly, Peter indicates that believers have entered into a salvation which is ready to be revealed in the last time [εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐτοιμὴν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ]. Each of these expressions suggests a present experience with a future orientation.

Thus, we can identify several key theological assumptions laid out at the beginning of 1 Peter that provide an important context for understanding the nature and function of prayer:

1. God has acted in mercy to establish believers in a new relationship with him. This sovereign and gracious act, accomplished by the historical event of the resurrection of Jesus, has placed believers in a position of privilege and hope.
2. God continues to act in the lives of his people by keeping the inheritance that he has promised to them secure and by shielding them from potential threats.
3. God has an eschatological purpose which has been inaugurated in history by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and in the believers’ personal experience by the new birth, but which will only be brought to completion at the culmination of all God’s purposes ‘in the last time’.

While these beliefs are not repeated in each of the letters of Peter and Jude, it is reasonable to believe that these provide a framework for each of the authors concerned as they are in line with common convictions as expressed in the NT documents (Stuhlmacher 2018, p. 510), even where they are expressed in distinctive terms.

## ■ Historical context

It is not possible to examine the scholarly discussion relating to the historical contexts of the letters of Peter and Jude. Significant differences of opinion regarding authorship and dating make it precarious to base significant interpretative decisions on any proposed historical setting, particularly with respect to 2 Peter and Jude. The situation with respect to 1 Peter, however, is somewhat different in that it is evident from the text of the letter (1 Pt 4:12; 5:9) that the Christians who are addressed are experiencing persecution in some form (Lee 2022, pp. 128–130). This information is compatible with the traditional ascription of authorship and the tradition that Peter was executed during the persecution of Christians by Nero in CE 64–CE 68 (Blomberg et al. 2021, pp. 647–654). If the textual ascription of Peter’s authorship of 2 Peter is accepted, that would suggest that the letter might legitimately be understood within the context of persecution, even though there is no specific reference to persecution in the letter (Blomberg et al. 2021, pp. 697–703). There is nothing in the text of Jude that demands a significantly different date or context. In both 2 Peter and Jude, there are clear indications that the threat to the well-being of the Christian community may come from within rather than solely from external opposition (2 Pt 2:1–3; Jude 4). We may suggest, therefore, that the instruction relating to prayer in the letters of Peter and Jude is given in the context of some form of threat, resistance, rejection, suspicion or persecution.

## ■ Identification of relevant texts

Various criteria have been employed in the selection of texts for this discussion. Firstly, several texts have been selected which themselves form prayers (either explicitly or implicitly). In the latter case, where there is no explicit reference to God as the addressee (such as in the letter-openings), these might also be interpreted as ‘wishes’ or ‘wish-prayers’ (Wilkins 1997, p. 945). Secondly, other texts have been chosen which address (or allude to) the topic of prayer in the context of either theological reflection or ethical instruction. Thirdly, several texts address the broader category of ‘worship’, which might be understood to include expressions of worship by means of prayer.

With respect to the most significant vocabulary used to describe prayer, the following words (and related forms) have been associated with the concept of prayer (ed. Silva 2014):

Prayer (cf. ask; bless; confess; worship): αἰτέω [*aiteō*], to ask, ask for, demand; δέομαι [*deomai*], to ask, request, beseech, pray; ἐντυγχάνω [*entynchanō*], to meet, approach, petition, intercede; ἐρωτάω [*erōtaō*], to ask, ask a question, request;



†εὐχομαι [*euchomai*], to pray, vow, wish; ἱκετηρία [*hiketēria*], earnest entreaty, supplication (Heb 5:7); παρακαλέω [*parakaleō*], to summon, exhort, encourage, implore; προσκυνέω [*proskyneō*], to prostrate oneself before (someone), do obeisance to, worship; προσπίπτω [*prospiptō*], to fall down (in submission), prostrate oneself (as a suppliant) (→ πίπτω); (cf. also ζητέω and κρούω in Mt 7:7 par. Lk 11:9). (p. 64)

In the letters of Peter and Jude, forms of the *noun* προσευχή are found in 1 Peter 3:7 and 4:7, while a form of the *noun* δέσις is found in 1 Peter 3:12. A form of the *verb* προσεύχομαι is found in Jude 20.

Even the list provided by Silva is not exhaustive, however. For example, a form of ἐπικαλέω used in 1 Peter 1:17 is probably a reference to the invocation of God in prayer (Elliott 2008, p. 365).

It is important to note, of course, that a concept may be expressed without using any particular term and so it is important to consider how authors convey meaning in sentences and not to rely too heavily on word studies (Osborne 2006, pp. 103–107; Thiselton 2015b, pp. 690–694).

Using the stated criteria and building on the work of Wilkins (1997, pp. 945–946), the following texts have been identified and categorised (the most relevant portions of the NA28 text have been inserted in square brackets into the rendering of the NIV):

### **1 Peter 1:2 – prayer/wish**

<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be yours in abundance [χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη].

### **1 Peter 1:3–5 – expression of praise/doxology**

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ]! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in Heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

### **1 Peter 1:17 – allusion to prayer/worship: 'You call on a Father'**

<sup>17</sup> Since you call [ἐπικαλεῖσθε] on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

### **1 Peter 2:5 – allusion to prayer/worship: 'Spiritual sacrifices'**

<sup>5</sup> [...] you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ [οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ].

### 1 Peter 3:7 – instruction on prayer

<sup>7</sup> Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers [εις τὸ μὴ ἐγκόπτεσθαι τὰς προσευχὰς ὑμῶν].

### 1 Peter 3:12 – instruction on prayer

<sup>12</sup> For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer [καὶ ὄτα αὐτοῦ εἰς δέησιν ἀγαθῶν], but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

### 1 Peter 4:7 – instruction on prayer

<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray [σωφρονήσατε οὖν καὶ νήψατε εἰς προσευχὰς].

### 1 Peter 4:11 – expression of praise/doxology

<sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. [ἵνα ἐν πᾶσιν δοξάζεται ὁ θεὸς διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ᾧ ἐστὶν ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.]

### 1 Peter. 5:5b–11 – instruction on prayer and expression of praise/doxology

<sup>5</sup> In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble'.

<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

<sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. [πᾶσαν τὴν μέριμναν ὑμῶν ἐπιτίψαντες ἐπ' αὐτόν, ὅτι αὐτῷ μέλει περὶ ὑμῶν.]

<sup>8</sup> Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

<sup>9</sup> Resist him [ᾧ ἀντίστητε], standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

<sup>10</sup> And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

<sup>11</sup> To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. [αὐτῷ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.]

### **1 Peter 5:14 – prayer/wish**

<sup>14</sup> Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ [Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ].

### **2 Peter 1:2 – prayer/wish**

<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. [χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.]

### **2 Peter 3:18 – expression of praise/doxology**

<sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. [αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα 'καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς ἡμέραν αἰῶνος.]

### **Jude 2 – prayer/wish**

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. [ἔλεος ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ ἀγάπη πληθυνθείη.]

### **Jude 20–21 – instruction on prayer**

<sup>20</sup> But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit [ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ προσευχόμενοι], <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

### **Jude 24–25 – expression of praise/doxology**

<sup>24</sup> To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – <sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. [Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ φυλάξαι ὑμᾶς ἀπταιστούς καὶ στήσαι κατενώπιον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἀμώμους ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει, <sup>25</sup> μόνῳ θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα μεγαλωσύνη κράτος καὶ ἐξουσία πρὸ παντὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς πάντα τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.]

## **■ Analysis of texts**

### **■ Expressions of prayer/worship**

#### **□ Introductory prayers/wishes**

Broadly following the standard conventions of the time, and in keeping with other NT letters, Peter and Jude include a short prayer/wish as part of each letter (Watson 1997, p. 650; Wilkins 1997, p. 945). We will consider all three relevant texts together in Table 10.1.

**TABLE 10.1:** Introductory prayer/wish.

English	Greek
<b>1 Peter 1:2:</b> Grace and peace be yours in abundance.	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη.
<b>2 Peter 1:2:</b> Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.
<b>Jude 2:</b> Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.	ἔλεος ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ ἀγάπη πληθυνθείη.

Source: Author's own work.

In each of these verses (see Table 10.1), the second-person plural pronoun in the dative case [ὑμῖν] indicates that the author's words are directed primarily to the readers of the letters rather than to God. This being the case, these pronouncements are not prayers in the strict sense of 'words addressed to God'. The use of the third-person aorist passive optative [πληθυνθείη] indicates, however, that the authors assume the agency of one other than the recipients. The most natural way to read this form of expression in the context of these early Christian letters is as a so-called 'divine passive' in which the passive verb points to the activity of God (rather than impersonal fate). These prayers/wishes, while similar to those found in the Pauline Letters, differ from the typical Pauline form of expression in two notable ways:

1. The author does not use the prepositional phrase [χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη] ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.<sup>212</sup> Given the use of such wish-prayers in many NT documents, the explicit reference to 'God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' as (jointly, using a single preposition) the source of grace and peace in Paul's words likely indicates what is implied by Peter and Jude when they express similar desires without the explicit use of a similar prepositional phrase.
2. The author includes the verb in the optative mood rather than leaving the verb unexpressed. As the occurrences of this verbal form in 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:2 and Jude 2 are the only examples in the NT, this contributes to the appearance of a connection between these three letters.

While these prayer wishes are not explicit expressions of prayer, they establish from the beginning that believers seek good for each other from God, who alone is the source of these blessings. The qualities which are prayed/wished for in the letters of Peter and Jude [χάρις, εἰρήνη, ἔλεος, ἀγάπη] are not solely associated with God (see the relevant articles in Balz &

212. Compare also (with slight variations of wording) 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philipppians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3. 1 Thessalonians 1:1 is the only exception to the use of this prepositional phrase.

Schneider 1990; Bauer & Danker 2000; ed. Silva 2014), but the Pauline parallels suggest that divine action is in mind in these cases. The term *πληθυνθείη* expresses ‘a celebrated quality of generous benefactors and patrons’ (Elliott 2008, p. 321), implying that God is not sparing in the way he deals graciously with his people.

## □ Other prayers/wishes

**TABLE 10.2:** Prayer/wish in 1 Peter 5:14.

English	Greek
Greet one another with a kiss of love.	ἀσπάσασθε ἀλλήλους ἐν φιλήματι ἀγάπης.
Peace to all of you who are in Christ.	Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ

Source: Author’s own work.

A notable feature of the canonical letters of Peter and Jude is that none of them include a section of prayer or thanksgiving at the start of the body of the letter such as is commonly found in the Letters of Paul (Rm 1:8–9; 1 Cor 1:4–6; Phlp 1:3–11; Col 1:3–14; 1 Th 1:2–3; 2 Th 1:3, 11; Phlm 4–7). There is a ‘benediction’ or blessing in 1 Peter 1 that is also found in some Pauline Letters, but otherwise, the only other prayer/wish is a brief remark found in 1 Peter 5. In 1 Peter 5:14 (see Table 10.2), Peter first instructs his readers to greet each other using an imperative verb. He then includes a verbless clause which closely resembles the type of ‘prayer/wish’ which is found in a number of places in the NT. Notable parallels are 3 John 15 and Ephesians 6:23. The former of these texts is particularly close in form to our text here in that it combines the prayer/wish with a greeting, and it does not explicitly state the source of the peace. The latter example of a parallel text suggests more specifically that peace, along with love and faith, comes from ‘God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’. Michaels (1988, p. 313) describes these words as ‘Peter’s own personal greeting’ and then as a ‘final wish’, but immediately recognises that ‘[p]eace, like love and grace and all else to which the epistle aspires, both begins with God and comes from God’. As with *other* verbless clauses, the supplied *verb* might be understood to be either indicative or optative. If the indicative mood is understood, the sense is that peace is the result of being ἐν Χριστῷ. The explicit use of a verb in the optative mood in the opening words of the letter provides a good reason for taking the sense here as being a similar prayer/wish.

## □ Blessing/doxology

There is no significant difference in character between texts which might be classed as ‘blessing’ or ‘benediction’ and texts which are typically described as ‘doxology’ (see Wu 1997, p. 660). In both cases, God is addressed indirectly in the third person, while believers are referred

to using either first- or second-person pronouns. According to Matthew Collins (2000):

A number of standard forms occur, most commonly describing God or God's actions as 'blessed': e.g. 'Blessed be the Lord' (Gn 24:27; 1 Sm 25:39; 2 Sm 18:28; Ps 28:6) or 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel' (1 Ki. 1:48; 1 Chr 16:36; Ps 41:13 [14]). These expressions are frequently completed with an enumeration of the actions performed by God. (pp. 355–356)

Neyrey (2008), however, does draw a distinction between these categories. With respect to Jude 24–35, which he considers a 'doxology', he writes (Neyrey 2008):

This doxology functions as the formal letter closing. Typical New Testament letters conclude with a benediction in which the sender calls down upon the addressees generalized heavenly favor ('grace be upon you', 1 Cor 16:23; 'grace [...] love [...] fellowship', 2 Cor 13:14; 'peace', 1 Pt 5:14). In form this resembles the benediction which generally begins the letter. Benedictions, then, tend to begin and end early Christian letters.

In place of the typical benediction, however, Jude pronounces a doxology. In Christian letters doxologies tend to occur at irregular points within a document (Rm 11:36; Gl 1:5; Phil 4:20; Eph 3:20–21; 1 Tm 1:17; 6:16; 2 Tm 4:18). Jude 24–25, Romans 16:25–27, and 2 Peter 3:18 are the only extant examples of doxologies which close New Testament letters (yet see *1 Clem* 65.2; *Mart Pol.* 22.3; *Diogn.* 12.9). Nevertheless, Jude employs a traditional form, even if used in a nontraditional way. (p. 94)

According to Bauckham (2008):

The strict doxological form has three or four parts: (1) the person praised, usually in the dative, often a pronoun; (2) the word of praise, usually *doxa*, quite often with the addition of other terms; (3) the indication of time, i.e. 'forever' or a fuller formula for eternity, usually followed by (4) 'Amen'. (p. 132)

Green (2008, p. 131, drawing on earlier work by Weima) claims that a 'doxology' always includes an ascription of 'glory' (hence the name). We will follow Bauckham and Green and use the presence of δόξα as a simple means of distinguishing a 'doxology' from a 'blessing' or 'benediction', though there is probably little significant theological distinction to be made between 'blessing' God and giving him 'glory'. If a distinction may be drawn, perhaps it is that a 'blessing' emphasises thanks due to God for what he has done, whereas a 'doxology' acknowledges the splendour of God's being. Thus, Thiselton (2015a, p. 342) writes, 'To glorify God denotes acknowledging his splendor, especially in Christ, and his worthiness to be adored'. Green notes that Hellenistic letters did not end with a doxology and that this manner of closing a letter appears to have been a Christian innovation (Green 2008, p. 130).

We will look at three such texts found in the letters of Peter and Jude. Firstly, we will consider a 'benediction' at the start of 1 Peter. Then we will note a brief 'doxology' in 1 Peter 4, followed by a similarly brief 'doxology'

at the end of 2 Peter. Finally, we will discuss a substantial ‘doxology’ at the end of Jude.

**TABLE 10.3:** Benediction in 1 Peter 1:3–5.

English	Greek
<p><sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in Heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.</p>	<p><sup>3</sup> Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ κατὰ τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν <sup>4</sup> εἰς κληρονομίαν ἄφθαρτον καὶ ἀμίαντον καὶ ἀμάραντον τετηρημένην ἐν οὐρανοῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς <sup>5</sup> τοὺς ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ φρουρουμένους διὰ πίστεως εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐτοιμίην ἀποκαλυφθῆναι ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ.</p>

Source: Author’s own work.

Immediately following the epistolary prescript, Peter expresses praise to God in what might be described as a ‘benediction’ (Elliott) or ‘doxology’ (Jobes). As discussed, we will describe this statement as a ‘benediction’. There is general agreement that Verses 3–12 form a unit, being composed of a single sentence (Achteimer 1996, p. 90; Jobes 2005, p. 79). We will focus our attention on Verses 3–5 (see Table 10.3), however, as, according to Elliott (2008):

[...] the blessing with which this unit begins formally embraces verses 3–5. With verse 6 the focus shifts from praise of God’s action to the behavior of the believers (vv. 6–9, prepared for by vv. 4b–5) and the prophets (vv. 10–12). (p. 329)

That being said, it is important to note the coherence of the whole passage, which, according to Elliott (2008, p. 329), is characterised by a ‘triadic structure [...] focusing on God the Father (vv. 3–5), Jesus Christ (vv. 6–9), and Holy Spirit (vv. 10–12)’ which, ‘echoes in modified sequence the similar triadic structure of v. 2 (God–Spirit–Jesus Christ)’.

The opening words [Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεός] are also found in 2 Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:3. They appear to follow a recognised formula. No verb is expressed and so the implied verb might be understood either as indicative (‘blessed is God’, so Elliott 2008, p. 330) or optative (‘blessed be God’, so Jobes 2005, p. 81). The choice does not significantly alter the sense of the statement. In the first case, the emphasis lies in Peter’s instruction, while in the latter case, the emphasis lies in the expression of praise. But in both cases, the instruction of believers and praise of God are combined.

The short doxology at the end of Verse 11 (see Table 10.4) follows a fairly typical form. It is composed of the standard elements of a doxology identified by Bauckham. In this doxology, both δόξα and κράτος are included in the ascription (see also 1 Pt 5:11). The question of who is to receive ‘the glory and the power’ is finely balanced. The immediate antecedent of the

**TABLE 10.4:** Doxology in 1 Peter 4:11.

English	Greek
<sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.	<sup>11</sup> εἴ τις λαλεῖ, ὡς λόγια θεοῦ· εἴ τις διακονεῖ, ὡς ἐξ ἰσχύος ἧς χορηγεῖ ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν πᾶσιν δοξάζηται ὁ θεός διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ᾧ ἐστὶν ἡ δόξα καὶ ὁ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.

Source: Author's own work.

relative pronoun is probably Jesus Christ, in the *prepositional phrase* διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The earlier purpose clause, ἵνα ἐν πᾶσιν δοξάζηται ὁ θεός, however, makes a reference to God being glorified quite natural. Jobes (2005) favours a reference to Jesus (following Michaels, but against Achtemeier, Elliott, Kelly and others) but notes that:

[/]In either case, the apparent ambiguity of the antecedent of the relative pronoun does not seem to trouble the author as much as it does modern interpreters, perhaps because he understands Christ and the Father to share such praiseworthy attributes. (p. 183)

A distinctive departure from the typical form of a doxology, and from all the other examples in the letters of Peter and Jude, is that a verbal form is explicitly provided, namely the indicative ἐστίν. Thus, as Elliott (2008, p. 762) points out, this doxology is not expressed as a prayer or wish (optative mood) but rather as a declaration of what is indeed the case (indicative mood).

**TABLE 10.5:** Doxology in 1 Peter 5:11.

English	Greek
<sup>11</sup> To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.	<sup>11</sup> αὐτῷ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. ἀμήν.

Source: Author's own work.

The wording in 1 Peter 5:11 (see Table 10.5) is very similar to that in 1 Peter 4:11, following closely the standard form of a doxology, except that, unusually, ἡ δόξα is not included. Thus, we effectively have a doxology, which lacks reference to glory! The most natural antecedent for the dative *pronoun* is ὁ δὲ θεὸς πάσης χάριτος in Verse 10.

**TABLE 10.6:** Doxology in 2 Peter 3:18.

English	Greek
<sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.	<sup>18</sup> αὐξάνετε δὲ ἐν χάριτι καὶ γνώσει τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς ἡμέραν αἰῶνος.*

Source: Author's own work.

Key: THGNT, Tyndale House Greek New Testament (eds. Dirk Jongkind & Peter Williams); SBLGNT, Society of Biblical Literature Greek New Testament (ed. Michael W. Holmes).

\*NA28 does not include the final ἀμήν in the text. It is included in the THGNT and the SBLGNT.



The brief doxology in 2 Peter 3:18b (see Table 10.6) employs the dative third-person pronoun ('to him') to refer to the reference to 'our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ' in Verse 18a. It is also composed of the standard elements of a doxology identified by Bauckham with no further elaboration. Theologically, this text has some significance for the interpretation of 1 Peter 4:11. Those, such as Elliott, who argue that the aforementioned text is not an example of a doxology applied to Jesus have argued that 'only rarely are doxologies addressed to or statements about Christ' (2008, p. 762). Yet, here is an example of a doxology which is clearly addressed to Christ (as Elliott recognises by listing this text among the rare exceptions to his claimed position). The ease with which glory can be ascribed to either God or Jesus Christ in these letters suggests, as Jobes noted, a Christological understanding that regards either kind of statement as entirely appropriate.

**TABLE 10.7:** Doxology in Jude 24–25.

English	Greek
<sup>24</sup> To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.	<sup>24</sup> Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ φυλάξαι ὑμᾶς ἀπταιστούς καὶ στήσαι κατενώπιον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἀμώμους ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει, <sup>25</sup> μόνῳ θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα μεγαλωσύνη κράτος καὶ ἐξουσία πρὸ παντός τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

Source: Author's own work.

These final words in the letter of Jude (see Table 10.7) are some of the most well-known words in the NT as a result of frequent liturgical use. As Mbuvi (2015) states:

This benediction is perhaps the best-known segment of Jude, recited often at the close of church services. (p. 62)

The doxology is substantially longer than most NT examples and includes substantial theological content. It may be divided into two main parts: firstly, a statement emphasising God's power to sustain believers and to bring their salvation to completion, and secondly, the doxology proper in which a number of attributes are ascribed to God forever.

In the first clause, God is identified using a substantive formed from the article in the dative case with a present participle [Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ {now, to the one who is able}]. God's ability is identified by means of two parallel infinitive clauses. Firstly, God's ability here relates particularly to the need 'to keep' the believers 'from falling'. In the midst of a dangerous situation, their perseverance does not depend on their own strength or convictions but on the entirely reliable strength and determination of God. What is more, according to the second infinitive clause, God will keep his people not simply at a minimal level but will present the believers 'faultless' before

God's throne. There is a clear allusion to the sacrificial system here, as that which is presented to God must be without defect (Davids 2006, p. 110).

Jude's developed doxology is similar in form to 1 Chronicles 29:

"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in Heaven and Earth is yours.(v. 11)

There is, however, limited similarity in the precise wording found in Jude and in the Septuagint (LXX) text [ἰ σοί, κύριε, ἡ μεγαλωσύνη καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ τὸ καύχημα καὶ ἡ νίκη καὶ ἡ ἰσχὺς, ὅτι σὺ πάντων τῶν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς δεσπόζεις]. It is likely that Jude here expresses praise in a manner that builds on the distinctive Christian use of doxology with awareness of the OT background but without direct dependence.

## ■ Theological statements relating to prayer

These texts address the topic of prayer, either implicitly or explicitly. In most cases, the theological instruction is part of some form of ethical exhortation.

**TABLE 10.8:** Theological statement relating to prayer in 1 Peter 1:17.

English	Greek
<sup>17</sup> As you call [ἐπικαλεῖσθε] on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.	<sup>17</sup> καὶ εἰ πατέρα ἐπικαλεῖσθε τὸν ἀπροσωπολήπτως κρίνοντα κατὰ τὸ ἐκάστου ἔργον, ἐν φόβῳ τὸν τῆς παροικίας ὑμῶν χρόνον ἀναστράφητε.

Source: Author's own work.

Peter (see Table 10.8) makes passing reference to 'calling on' the Father in the protasis of an 'indefinite' (Whitacre 2022, §5.238) or 'neutral' (Van Emde Boas et al. 2019, §49.4) conditional sentence ('first class', in many grammars). In this construction, we may either say that 'the speaker gives no indication of the likelihood of the realisation of the action in the protasis' (Van Emde Boas et al. 2019, p. 551) or that the accuracy of the statement in the protasis is assumed *for the sake of argument*, whether it is, in fact, true. In either case, Peter apparently considers such invocation to be convincing grounds for an appeal to his readers to be faithful in their discipleship as God holds his people accountable. The reference to calling on the Father also, however, suggests a characteristic practice and a sense of the Fatherly care and provision of God expressed in prayer. Schreiner (2003, p. 82) observes how striking it is 'that God's tenderness and love as Father is mingled with his judgement and the fear that should mark Christians in this world'. Schreiner is probably correct to suggest that the language of calling on the Father most likely derives from Jesus' teaching (e.g. Mt 6:1, 4, 8-9).

**TABLE 10.9:** Theological statement relating to prayer in 1 Peter 3:7.

English	Greek
<sup>7</sup> Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.	<sup>7</sup> Οἱ ἄνδρες ὁμοίως, συνοικοῦντες κατὰ γνώσιν ὡς ἀσθενεστέρω σκεύει τῷ γυναικείῳ, ἀπονέμοντες τιμὴν ὡς καὶ συγκληρονόμοις χάριτος ζωῆς εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐγκόπτεσθαι τὰς προσευχὰς ὑμῶν.

Source: Author's own work.

Peter makes this passing reference to prayer (see Table 10.9) in the context of his 'household code'. The *verb* ἐγκόπτω is rare (ed. Silva 2014, pp. 81–83). The standard Greek lexicon (BDAG) (Bauer & Danker 2000, p. 274) translates the articular infinitive construction as a purpose clause: 'εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐγκόπτεσθαι τὰς προσευχὰς ὑμῶν' [in order that your prayers may not be hindered], but it remains unclear in what way prayers might be hindered. While Peter's precise meaning may remain elusive, we can say that Peter links the behaviour of husbands towards their wives with their prayers. The nature of the connection is perhaps clarified somewhat by the citation from Psalm 34, to which we turn next.

**TABLE 10.10:** Theological statement relating to prayer in 1 Peter 3:12.

English	Greek
<sup>12</sup> For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil	<sup>12</sup> ὅτι ὀφθαλμοὶ κυρίου ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ὅτα αὐτοῦ εἰς δέησιν αὐτῶν, πρόσωπον δὲ κυρίου ἐπὶ ποιοῦντας κακά.

Source: Author's own work.

This instruction (see Table 10.10) is in the form of a citation of 'the LXX form of Psalms 33:17a' (Achteimeier 1996, p. 226). The citation provides a rationale for the claim in 1 Peter 3:7 that if a husband treats his wife inappropriately, it will 'hinder' his prayers. This is not a matter of impersonal 'cause and effect'. Rather, the one to whom the man prays is attentive to the prayers of the righteous but is 'against' those who do evil. This reality is compounded by the corollary that, if the wife is mistreated, she can pray to the Lord with the expectation that the Lord will be attentive to her prayer for justice in the face of mistreatment.

**TABLE 10.11:** Theological statement relating to prayer in 1 Peter 4:7.

English	Greek
<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.	<sup>7</sup> Πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος ἤγγικεν. σωφρονήσατε οὖν καὶ νήψατε εἰς <sup>†</sup> προσευχὰς

Source: Author's own work.

This brief reference to prayer (see Table 10.11) is set in the context of eschatological urgency. Similar (though not identical) language is used in various other parts of the NT (e.g. Mt 3:2; 4:17; Phlp 4:5). Thus, Achteimeier (1996, p. 294) correctly notes that 'although the phrase πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος

ἤγγικεν is unique to 1 Peter, therefore, the point belongs to common Christian tradition'. The reference to τὸ τέλος need not be understood as a reference to a final cataclysm or 'the end of the world'. While some readings of 2 Peter 3 might lead to that conclusion, it is more likely that there is an emphasis on the completion of God's eschatological purposes, marked by the resurrection of Jesus, than any attempt to identify a timetable. That decisive eschatological transition requires that believers constantly live in a state of alertness, with particular reference to (or perhaps for the purpose of) prayer.

**TABLE 10.12:** Theological statement relating to prayer in 1 Peter 5:5b–11.

English	Greek
<p><sup>5</sup>In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble'.</p> <p><sup>6</sup>Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. <sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup>Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.</p> <p><sup>10</sup>And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. <sup>11</sup>To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.</p>	<p><sup>5</sup>ὁμοίως, νεώτεροι, ὑποτάγητε πρεσβυτέροις· πάντες δὲ ἀλλήλοις τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην ἐγκομβώσασθε, ὅτι</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">ὁ θεὸς ὑπερηφάνους ἀντιτάσεται, ταπεινοὺς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν.</p> <p><sup>6</sup>Ταπεινώθητε οὖν ὑπὸ τὴν κραταιὰν χεῖρα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ὑμᾶς ὑψώσῃ ἐν καιρῷ, <sup>7</sup>πᾶσαν τὴν μέριμναν ὑμῶν ἐπιρίψαντες ἐπ' αὐτόν, ὅτι αὐτῷ μέλει περὶ ὑμῶν. <sup>8</sup>νήψατε, γρηγορήσατε. ὁ ἀντίδικος ὑμῶν διάβολος ὡς λέων ὠρυόμενος περιπατεῖ ζητῶν τινα καταπιεῖν. <sup>9</sup>ᾧ ἀντίστητε στερεοὶ τῇ πίστει εἰδότες τὰ αὐτὰ τῶν παθημάτων τῇ ἐν κόσμῳ ὑμῶν ἀδελφότητι ἐπιτελεῖσθαι.</p> <p><sup>10</sup>ὁ δὲ θεὸς πάσης χάριτος, ὁ καλέσας ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον αὐτοῦ δόξαν ἐν Χριστῷ ὀλίγον παθόντας αὐτὸς καταρτίσει, στηρίξει, σθενώσει, θεμελιώσει. <sup>11</sup>αὐτῷ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.</p>

Source: Author's own work.

This passage (see Table 10.12) contains two statements with potential relevance to our topic. In Verse 7, Peter urges believers to 'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you'; then, in Verse 11, Peter includes a short doxology. We have already discussed the doxology above.

Although none of the main terms relating to prayer appear in this passage, the instruction to 'cast all your anxiety on him' points to a relationship of trust in, and dependence on, God. The background of the statement appears to be Psalm 55:22 (LXX, 54:23), which reads as shown in Table 10.13.

**TABLE 10.13:** Psalm 55:22 (LXX, 54:23).

Greek	English
<p><sup>22</sup>Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.</p>	<p><sup>22</sup>ἐπίρριψον ἐπὶ κύριον τὴν μέριμνά σου, καὶ αὐτὸς σε διαθρέψει, οὐ δώσει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα σάλον τῷ δικαίῳ.</p>

Source: Author's own work.

Verbal connections with 1 Peter 5 are evident:

<sup>7</sup> πᾶσαν τὴν μέριμναν ὑμῶν ἐπιρίψαντες ἐπ’ αὐτόν,\* ὅτι αὐτῷ μέλει περὶ ὑμῶν. (v. 7a)

The way in which one goes about casting one’s anxiety on God is not stated explicitly. Although the verb ἐπι(ρ)ρίπτω can be used for casting a physical object (Lk 19:35), it is reasonable to read this instance in 1 Peter as an allusive reference to prayer. Elliott (2008, pp. 851–852) points to the similar language of Philippians 4:6, where the link between care and prayer is made explicit. The rationale for taking this action is God’s disposition towards his people: ‘he cares for you’.

**TABLE 10.14:** Theological statement relating to prayer in Jude 20–21.

English	Greek
<sup>20</sup> But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.	<sup>20</sup> Ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀγαπητοί, ἐποικοδομοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς τῇ ἁγιωτάτῃ ὑμῶν πίστει, ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ προσευχόμενοι, <sup>21</sup> ἑαυτοὺς ἐν ἀγάπῃ θεοῦ τηρήσατε προσδεχόμενοι τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

Source: Author’s own work.

Jude addresses his readers as ἀγαπητοί on three occasions (see vv. 3, 17, 20). In Verse 20 (see Table 10.14), we have the second occurrence of the emphatic phrase Ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀγαπητοί (also v. 17). These two uses suggest a strong contrast between what Jude expects of his readers and the character of those concerning whom he has warned them in the preceding verses.

The main instruction in Verses 20–21 is ἑαυτοὺς ἐν ἀγάπῃ θεοῦ τηρήσατε, with the aorist imperative being the only finite verb in this sentence. The three participial phrases which surround the imperative might be understood to share in the imperatival force of the verb as participles of ‘attendant circumstances’, but even if that is the case, they support the imperative grammatically. Thus, the way in which the believers must ‘keep themselves in God’s love’ is threefold (Jude 20–21):

- ‘building yourselves up in you most holy faith’
- ‘praying in/by the Holy Spirit’
- ‘awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life’.

Thus, prayer is an aspect of the action to be taken by believers to ensure (from a human perspective) that they are kept in God’s love.

## ■ Theological statements relating to worship

In these texts we find references to worship without any specific mention of prayer. It is nonetheless possible that prayer is implied in these passages.

**TABLE 10.15:** Theological statement relating to worship in 1 Peter 2:5.

English	Greek
<sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.	<sup>5</sup> καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Source: Author's own work.

First Peter 2:5 (see Table 10.15) forms part of a unit in which the image of stone/stones is applied both to Jesus and to believers (2 Pt 2:4–8). Peter identifies Jesus as the ‘living stone’ and most of this section is devoted to a Christological interpretation of this image in Isaiah and the Psalms. In Verse 5, however, Peter applies the same terminology to believers who have ‘come to’ Jesus in faith. As ‘living stones’ (plural), their function is different from that of Jesus. They are being built [οἰκοδομεῖσθε] into a ‘spiritual house’ [οἶκος πνευματικός] ‘to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’. There is little doubt that the reference to a ‘spiritual house’ [οἶκος πνευματικός] echoes the reference in 2 Samuel 7. That this is a reference to a temple is confirmed by the references to ‘a holy priesthood’ that is ‘offering spiritual sacrifices’. This interpretation is corroborated by the similar language used by Paul in Ephesians 2:19–22.

## ■ Conclusion

Like many biblical documents, the letters of Peter and Jude do not include specific discussions on the nature of prayer. Rather, the reality and importance of prayer are assumed. The references identified and discussed in this chapter suggest the following conclusions:

- Prayer is a natural aspect of caring relationships between followers of Jesus. Each of these letters begins, following the typical conventions of the day, with an expression of desire for the good of those who receive the letter. While these might be construed as vague hopes for fate to be kind towards the recipients of the letters, the references to the distinctive blessings of grace and peace suggest that these are implicit prayers. Such prayers are sometimes found at other points in a letter.
- A significant aspect of prayer in the letters of Peter and Jude is the expression of praise and doxology. Although it is clear that petition is understood to be an appropriate element of prayers, statements of praise (1) and doxology (4) are prominent in these three letters.
- There is a strong connection between prayer and ethical behaviour. Peter, in particular, connects the effectiveness of prayer with relationships with others and with a sober attitude.

- Prayer is an aspect of the calling of God's people to live as a spiritual temple in which prayer forms a part of the 'spiritual sacrifices' that are offered.

In situations of threat and opposition such as those apparently faced by the recipients of their letters, Peter and Jude offer prayer, benediction, and doxology as a means of encouraging and enabling their readers to gain an accurate theological perspective on their difficult circumstances.

# Prayer in John's Epistles: Confidence of faith, fellowship and truth

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## ■ Introduction

There are only two passages in John's Epistles that explicitly refer to the prayers of believers. These passages are 1 John 3:22 and 1 John 5:13-17. Of these passages, only 1 John 5:13-17 has received the attention of scholarly investigation, focused almost exclusively on the matter of praying for those who have (not) committed sin unto death (e.g. Randall 2002; Scholer 1975; Smilie 1999). The topic of prayer as such in these epistles has, however, not yet been studied properly. The purpose of this article is to attempt such an investigation. In doing so, John's use of prayer-words in these letters is studied. Also, the place that references to prayer take within John's argument in each epistle is investigated, as well as their place within the immediate context of the particular pericope. Furthermore, exegetical conclusions about each pericope are made in order to provide a clearer picture of John's teaching about prayer in his epistles.

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## ■ Prayer-words in John's Epistles

The two passages in 1 John in which prayers are explicitly mentioned follow here.

### 1 John 3:21-22

<sup>21</sup> Ἀγαπητοί, ἐὰν ἡ καρδία μὴ καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν, παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν,

<sup>22</sup> καὶ ὁ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν λαμβάνομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ὅτι τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἄρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιῶμεν.

<sup>21</sup> Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God

<sup>22</sup> and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him<sup>213</sup> (NIV).

### 1 John 5:13-17

This passage may be read as two separate pericopes:

<sup>13</sup> Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>14</sup> καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ παρρησία ἣν ἔχομεν πρὸς αὐτόν, ὅτι ἐὰν τι αἰτῶμεθα κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ἀκούει ἡμῶν. <sup>15</sup> καὶ ἐὰν οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀκούει ἡμῶν ὁ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεθα, οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἔχομεν τὰ αἰτήματα ἃ ἠτήκαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.

<sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. <sup>14</sup> This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 Jn 5:13-15)

<sup>16</sup> Ἐὰν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, αἰτήσῃ, καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον. ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον· οὐ περὶ ἐκείνης λέγω ἵνα ἐρωτήσῃ. <sup>17</sup> πᾶσα ἀδικία ἁμαρτία ἐστίν, καὶ ἔστιν ἁμαρτία οὐ πρὸς θάνατον.

<sup>16</sup> If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. <sup>17</sup> All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. (1 Jn 5:16-17)

In these passages two Greek words are used in reference to prayer/praying, *viz.* αἰτεῖν/αἰτήμα (six times) and ἐρωτᾶν (once). The word ἐρωτᾶ also occurs in John's second epistle, in 2 John 1:5, with the words ἐρωτᾶ σε, κυρία' [I ask you, my lady]. As this passage obviously does not contain a prayer towards God but rather a request to a human person, it is not relevant for this study. As a matter of fact, no references to prayers are found in either 2 or 3 John. Therefore, this investigation is focused on the first of these three epistles.

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213. Unless stated otherwise in this chapter, the English translations in Chapter 11 in this book come from the NIV of the Bible.

A brief componential analysis of *αἰτεῖν* [*αἰτήμα*] shows that the word is used in the New Testament (NT) with the meaning ‘to ask for’, ‘to plead for’ and ‘to demand’, in the semantic field 33.161–177, within subdomain L (cf. Louw & Nida 1988, p. 407). The request may be directed either to God or to humans. In the case of first John, the immediate context in each of the six occurring instances indicates that *αἰτήμα/αἰτεῖν* is used with reference to a prayer towards God. Likewise, *ἑρωτᾶν* [*ἑρωτήμα*] is used to put a request to either God or humans. Bauer et al. (2000, p. 25) explain that in the NT, *ἑρωτᾶν/ἑρωτήμα* (as also *αἰτεῖν/αἰτήμα*) followed by *περί τινος* expresses a prayer about something or someone. This seems to be the case in 1 John 5:16: ‘οὐ περὶ ἐκεῖνης λέγω ἵνα ἑρωτήσῃ’ [I am not saying that you should pray about that].

Although it is not found in John’s Epistles, elsewhere in the NT prayers are also expressed by the word group *δεήσις/δέομαι* (Louw & Nida 1988, p. 408), *viz.* an urgent request to God to give you something (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 25; cf. Greeven 1985, p. 144; Stählin 1985, p. 30). It differs in this respect from yet another prayer-word in the NT, (*προσ*)*εὔχεσθαι*, which is the most generic reference to prayers towards God, simply meaning ‘to speak to God’, hence ‘to pray’ (Louw & Nida 1988, p. 409; cf. also Greeven 1985, p. 144). Whereas *δέομαι* and (*προσ*)*εὔχεσθαι*, by and large, belong to the vocabulary situations of worship, *αἰτήμα/αἰτεῖν* and *ἑρωτᾶν* are used in as it were personal petitions to God. In comparison, John seems to use *αἰτεῖν/αἰτήμα* in general terms [anything you ask], and in the case of specific prayers he employs both *αἰτεῖν* and *ἑρωτᾶν* (the latter regarding sin not leading to death).

One striking feature of 1 John 3:21–22 and 1 John 5:13–17 is that in both these passages prayer is directly linked to the word *παρρησία* (1 Jn 3:21: *παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ ὃ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν [...]*; 5:14 *αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ παρρησία ἣν ἔχομεν πρὸς αὐτόν ὅτι ἐὰν τι αἰτῶμεθα [...]*). This feature calls for a brief semantic analysis of the word *παρρησία*. Louw and Nida (1988, p. 307) place *παρρησία* in semantic subdomain 25.158, meaning ‘boldness’, ‘courage’ or ‘freedom to speak’. This use of *παρρησία* may be the case in 1 John 3:21, where John’s argument is more or less that believers have the courage to approach God freely and therefore feel free to ask from him in prayer. In 1 John 5:14, however, John seems to add a new element to the meaning of the word. In this verse, John, as it were, gives a definition of his understanding of *παρρησία* with the words: ‘This is the *παρρησία* we have in approaching God, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us’ (1 Jn 5:14). In this context the element of certainty is added so that *παρρησία* in this case rather bears the meaning of ‘confidence’, ‘certainty’ or ‘assurance’. In fact, in both 1 John 3:22 and 1 John 5:14, *παρρησία* could best be understood in the sense of ‘boldness or confidence based on certainty’ (cf. Brooke 1912, p. 102).

In summary, the prayer-words used in 1 John show that John does not have in mind prayers of worship but prayers of asking [αἰτήματα/αἰτεῖν and ἐρωτᾶν]. A point John is making is that such petitions should be made with *παρηρησία*, which means (1) confidence to approach God in prayer and also (2) assurance that God will hear the prayer and give what is asked.

## ■ The context of the argument of 1 John as a whole

The general view of scholars is that 1 John was not written as an epistle, but was meant as a written sermon (e.g. Coetzee 1988, p. 198; Floor 2002, p. 37; Kümmel 1972, p. 307). In support of this view, I regard 1 John as a homily, featuring a more or less homiletic structure. This structure is somewhat complicated by John's tendency not to organise his argument in a symmetrical manner but in a spiral-like repetition of thoughts (cf. Coetzee 1988, p. 203; Lieu 1991, pp. 22–23). In spite of this difficulty, a definite homiletic structure can be detected in 1 John, comprising of an introduction, a proclaimed indicative, a resulting imperative, a promise and assurance to the readers (author's own exposition).

### ■ Introduction (1 Jn 1:1–4)

Basis of the homily: The true testimony of John as an eyewitness of Jesus Christ, the Word 'incarnate' (1 Jn 1:1–2).

Purpose of the homily:

- to proclaim eternal life in Jesus (1 Jn 1:2)
- to build the fellowship of the believers and *koinonia* [fellowship] with God (1 Jn 1:3)
- to complete the joy of the believers (1 Jn 1:4).

### ■ Living in the light of God (1 Jn 1:5–2:27)

*Indicative*: God is light (1 Jn 1:5).

*Imperative*: Walk in God's light (1 Jn 1:6–2:27).

In this section, themes are revisited that return later on in the spiral thought pattern:

- Walk in obedience to God's commands and do not sin (1 Jn 1:8–2:8).
- Walk in brotherly love (1 Jn 2:9–17).
- Walk in the truth about Jesus in the flesh, not in the lie of the Antichrist (1 Jn 2:18–27).

*Assurance:* Walking in God's light is true *koinonia* (1 Jn 1:6-7; 2:5-6; 2:24-27).

*Promise:* We shall overcome evil (1 Jn 2:12-27) and receive eternal life (1 Jn 2:25).

## ■ Living as children of God (1 Jn 2:28-4:6)

*Indicative:* God is our Father, and we are his children (1 Jn 2:29-3:3).

*Imperative:* Walk as children of God (1 Jn 3:4-4:6).

Again earlier and later themes in the spiral thought pattern are visited:

- Walk in obedience to God's commands and do not sin (1 Jn 3:4-10; 3:21-24).
- Walk in brotherly love (1 Jn 3:11-23).
- Walk in the truth about Jesus, not in the lie of the Antichrist (1 Jn 4:1-6).

*Assurance:* Children have *koinonia* with the Father and Son (1 Jn 2:28-3:2; 3:19-24; 4:2-6).

*Promise:* Children will receive *eternal life* (1 Jn 3:14) and overcome the Antichrist (1 Jn 4:4-6).

## ■ Living in the love of God (1 Jn 4:7-5:5)

*Indicative:* God is love. He showed his love by sending his son for us (1 Jn 4:8-16).

*Imperative:* Walk in his love (1 Jn 4:7-5:3).

The love for fellow believers (1 Jn 4:11-5:2).

The love for God (1 Jn 4:19-5:3).

*Assurance:* Love due to *koinonia* with God (1 Jn 4:12-16).

*Promise:* We shall receive *life* through the Son (1 Jn 4:9) and overcome the world (1 Jn 5:4-5).

## ■ Living in the truth of God (1 Jn 5:6-21)

*Indicative:* The Spirit is the true witness, testifying about the Son of God (1 Jn 4:8-16).

*Imperative:* Believe in his testimony. Believe in God and his son (1 Jn 5:9-10).

*Promise:* Whoever believes this testimony as *the truth* will have *eternal life* (1 Jn 4:11-13).

*Assurance:* Whoever believes in him, has confidence in prayer before God (1 Jn 5:13-17) and lives in *koinonia* with him (1 Jn 5:18-21).

This exposition of 1 John's thought structure shows that the concepts *truth about Jesus*, *eternal life* and *koinonia* are frequently repeated throughout the homily. These concepts (marked in bold in the exposition) take a central position in John's introduction, and from there onwards they recur in every main section up to the end of the homily. This is part of the spiral-pattern in which John organises thoughts in his writings. Characteristic of this pattern is that when a specific concept is revisited at each new turn of the spiral, something new is often added to it. Within this structure, John writes about the prayers of the believers. So it comes as no surprise that at certain turns of the thought-spiral the concept of prayer is added and linked to the aspects of 'truth about Jesus', '*koinonia*' or 'eternal life'.

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, there are two passages where John writes explicitly about prayer. The first (1 Jn 3:21-22) occurs in the earlier section titled 'Living as children of God (1 Jn 2:28-4:6)', a section in which John urges his readers to live as children of God. Being God's children means that they are in him and he in them. This is another way of saying that they live in close *koinonia* with the Father and the Son. Because of this *koinonia*, believers, *inter alia*, have the assurance that the Father hears their prayers so that they receive whatever they ask from him (1 Jn 3:22).

The second prayer-passage (1 Jn 5:13-17) is part of the section titled 'Living in the truth of God (1 Jn 5:6-21)', which is focused on the truth of God as witnessed by the Spirit. The implicit imperative of this section is to believe the witness of the Spirit, not only accepting it as truth but also believing in God and in Jesus as his Son. This witness of the Spirit is linked to faith, truth and also to the matter of prayer in 1 John 5:13-17. In these verses, the readers are assured that whoever believes the truth as witnessed by the Spirit, and accordingly believes in Jesus as the Son, has confidence in prayer before God. So, faith in God's truth leads to confidence before him, on which basis we can approach God in prayer. This confidence includes the assurance that God will give what is asked in the prayer.

A fair deduction from these observations is that in his teaching about the confidence of our prayers, John first of all bases such confidence on the close and intimate relation between believers and God, that is, their *koinonia*. Then, later on, at a following turn of the thought-spiral, he adds that our confidence is based not only on our *koinonia* but also on our faith in the truth about Jesus Christ as witnessed by the Holy Spirit.

## ■ The immediate context of 1 John 3:21-22

The next step of investigation is to understand both these prayer-passages within their immediate context, starting with 1 John 3:21-22. Verses 21-23 are part of a line of argument in the section titled 'Living as children of God (1 Jn 2:28-4:6)', which can be summarised more or less as follows.

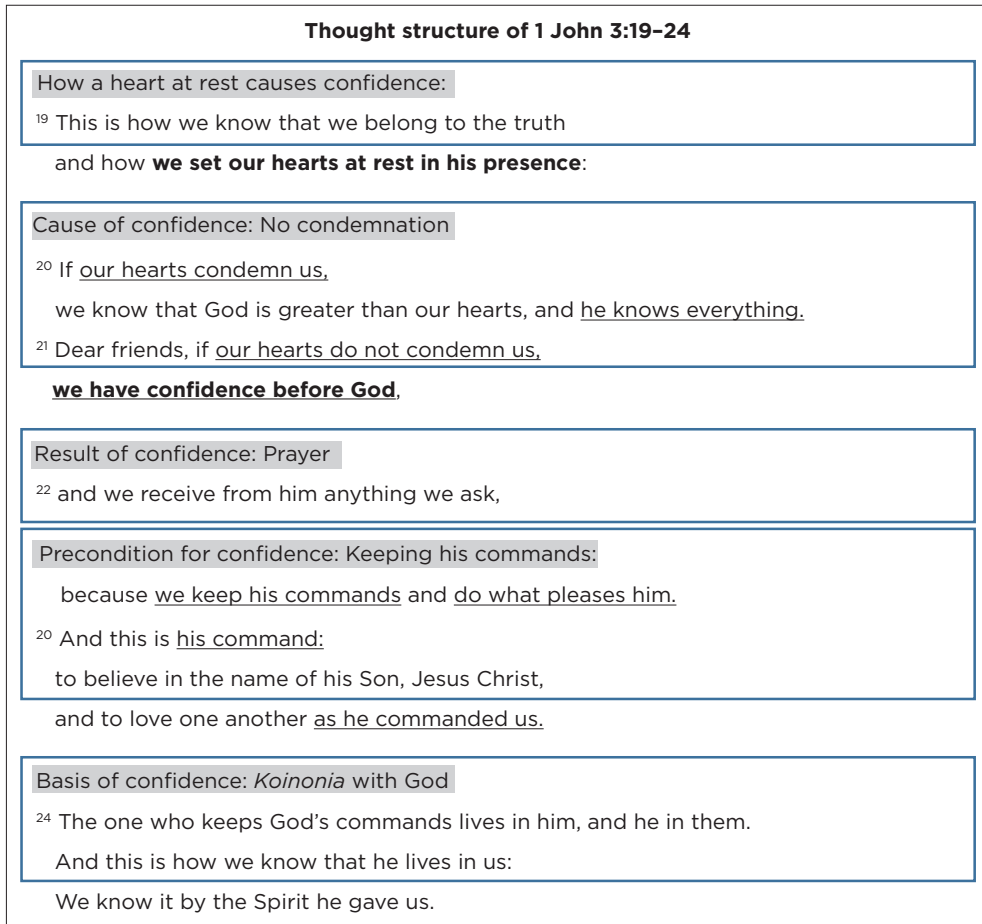
'Living as children of God (1 Jn 2:28–4:6)' is developed from the basic indicative that God has made us his children (1 Jn 3:1). From this indicative flows the imperative that we should live a life that is becoming to God's children. Imbedded in the imperative section of the homily is an assurance. Believers who honestly strive to live such a life will experience that they are not condemned by their own conscience in their hearts (see 'Living as children of God [1 Jn 2:28–4:6]'; cf. 1 Jn 3:18–20). They know that God knows everything, including our sins (cf. 1 Jn 3:20). He also knows the hidden motives by which each of his children acts (Brooke 1912, p. 102). According to Kruze (2000, p. 141), this verse actually says that if our hearts condemn us because of our sins, God knows better – he knows that his grace is far greater than our hearts can expect.

Whichever of these explanations is followed, the fact remains that God knows the hearts of his children because of their *koinonia* with him. *Koinonia* is the result of the believers living in God and he abiding in them (1 Jn 3:24); it is the closest possible intimacy of God's children with him, for it means that his indwelling by his Spirit is so drastic and intimate that his will becomes our will (Campbell 2017, p. 128). The knowledge of this *koinonia* with God sets our hearts at rest in his presence (1 Jn 3:19), to the point that we have the confidence to approach God in our prayers. Not only do we have the confidence to approach him, but also to ask freely from him in our petitions, and even the confidence that he will give whatever we ask (1 Jn 3:22).

From these considerations it becomes clear that the confidence of those who truly live as God's children is reflected in their prayers. The relation between confidence and prayer is seen in the thought structure of 1 John 3:19–24 (Figure 11.1).

From the thought structure exposition in Figure 11.1, it is clear that the pericope deals with our confidence in terms of setting our hearts at rest before God (1 Jn 3:19). The cause of such confidence is that in our hearts we know that we stand without condemnation before God (1 Jn 3:20–21). The result of such confidence is that we may pray to God with certainty that he will hear our prayer and give what we ask (1 Jn 3:21–22). There is, however, one precondition: to set our hearts at rest, we should keep God's commands as becomes us as his children (1 Jn 3:22–23). His command is then defined as (1) faith in Jesus Christ and (2) love for one another (1 Jn 2:23). Moreover, the basis for our confidence is identified as our *koinonia* with God: we live in him and he in us, a *koinonia* that we have by the Holy Spirit he gave us (1 Jn 3:24). Awareness of this *koinonia* provides confidence to speak freely before God.

In this way, John teaches his readers in this pericope that the prayers of believers result from their confidence before God in a very special way.



Source: The author's own work.

**FIGURE 11.1:** Thought structure of 1 John 3:19-24.

Confidence before God flows from the peace of heart that they are not condemned before God, and as such is linked to the extent to which they please God by doing what he commanded (Kruze 2000, p. 189), in faith and in love. Moreover, the confidence with which believers pray to God is based on their assurance that, as his children, they have *koinonia* with him through the Holy Spirit.

## ■ The immediate context of 1 John 5:13-17

In 1 John 5:13-17, John for the second time in the homily writes about prayer. This time the context is different from the first. Prayer is mentioned here as part of the exhortation to live in the truth as testified by the Holy Spirit (see the earlier section titled 'Living in the truth of God (1 Jn 5:6-21)').

This exhortation rests on the indicative of the Spirit as the trustworthy witness of God's truth (1 Jn 5:9–10). The truth as testified by the Spirit is defined in 1 John 5:11: 'And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son'. This definition is directly in line with the purpose of John's homily as a whole, *viz.* the proclamation that whoever believes in the name of the Son of God has eternal life (1 Jn 5:13;<sup>214</sup> 1:2; cf. also the structure exposition in the earlier section titled 'Introduction [1 Jn 1:1–4]'). The readers are not only exhorted to believe in the Son of God, but they are also assured that as believers they receive from him life everlasting.

Against this background, John writes about the prayers of believers in Chapter 5. Similar to Chapter 3, he links our prayers to the confidence we receive before God (1 Jn 5:14). It seems that John again follows his typical spiral thought pattern. In Chapter 3, he based our confidence on our *koinonia* with the Father; in Chapter 5, he goes a step further and bases our confidence on the knowledge of our faith. By accepting the testimony of the Spirit, we know that Jesus is the Son of God and that in him we have eternal life (1 Jn 5:13). From this knowledge of faith, we have confidence to approach God in prayer. This knowledge also leads to the confidence that we will receive from him whatever we ask (1 Jn 5:14–15). So, in this pericope, John teaches that not only our *koinonia* with God but also the assurance we receive from our faith in the truth about Jesus leads us to confidence in our prayers before him (Brooke 1912, p. 143).

The discussed outline of 1 John 5:14–15 can be presented schematically in Box 11.1:

**BOX 11.1:** The schematic outline of 1 John 5:14–15.

<b>Outline of 1 John 5:14–15</b>		
<p><sup>14</sup> This is the confidence we have in approaching God, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.</p>	<p><b>a</b> ask <b>b</b> hear</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Confidence of prayer:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is based on <b>knowing</b> – that if we <u>ask</u> on His will – God <u>hears</u> us.</li> <li>• Knowing that He <u>hears</u> us – lets us <b>know</b> that we have – whatever we <u>ask</u> Him.</li> </ul> </div>
<p><sup>15</sup> And if <b>we know</b> that he hears us, – whatever we ask – <b>we know</b> that we have what we asked of him</p>	<p><b>b</b> hear <b>a</b> ask <b>a</b> ask</p>	

Source: The author's own work.

However, confidence to approach God in prayer and confidence that he will give whatever we ask does not mean unlimited freedom in our prayers. Therefore, John adds in 1 John 5:14 that we may ask from God anything

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214. 1 John 5:13: 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life'.



'according to his will'. Thereby he sets God's will as a limit to what we may ask in our prayers. We can pray with confidence that God will give what we ask only in so far as we know his will. So, this confidence goes hand in hand with the responsibility to come to understand God's will. Now, understanding the will of God depends on a true and loving relationship with God, in which we align our will with his will (Campbell 2017, p. 126). What is God's will? Up to this point of the homily, various aspects were mentioned. Firstly, it is God's will that we lead a life as his children, in close *koinonia* with him as our Father. Secondly, it is God's will that we honestly strive to obey his commands. Thirdly, it is his will that his children love one another. And now, in 1 John 5:14-15, we learn that it is God's will that we accept the testimony of the Holy Spirit and believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. As long as our prayers remain between these limits, they are pleasing to God.

In 1 John 5:16, John proceeds to the topic of intercession in our prayers. As part of our *koinonia* with and love for one another, we should intercede for our fellow brothers and sisters when we pray. As a practical example, John takes a brother who has sinned. When you see a brother who commits a sin, you should pray for him, so that he may repent and again receive life in Christ. The topic of our intercession for sinners in a certain sense echoes the intercession of Christ for our sins, as mentioned in the first part of the homily, specifically 1 John 2:1. In 1 John 2:1, John refers to Jesus Christ as our righteous Advocate [παράκλητος] before the Father, who intercedes for us if we have sinned. So our prayers for a brother who has sinned will actually be heard for no other reason than the intercession of Jesus Christ, our true παράκλητος before God. Yet, because of our *koinonia* and love for one another, we are obliged to persevere in intercession for our brothers and sisters.

In 1 John 5:16-17, the topic of limitations to our prayers is revisited. The outline of these verses is presented in Box 11.2:

**BOX 11.2:** An outline of the topic of limitations to our prayers in 1 John 5:14-15.

<b>Outline of 1 John 5:16-17</b>		
<p><sup>16</sup> If anyone sees a brother commit a sin</p> <p>that does <u>not lead to death</u>,</p> <p>you should <b>pray</b></p> <p>and <i>God will give life to them</i> -</p> <p>to those whose sin does <u>not lead to death</u>.</p> <p>There is a sin that <u>leads to death</u>.</p> <p>I do not say that you should <b>pray</b> about that.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> All wrongdoing is sin,</p> <p>and there is sin that does <u>not lead to death</u>.</p>	<p><i>x</i><sup>1</sup> <i>not death</i></p> <p><i>y</i><sup>1</sup> <i>pray</i></p> <p><i>z</i> <i>life</i></p> <p><i>x</i><sup>1</sup> <i>not death</i></p> <p><i>x</i><sup>2</sup> <i>death</i></p> <p><i>y</i><sup>2</sup> <i>not pray</i></p> <p><i>x</i><sup>1</sup> <i>not death</i></p>	<p><b>Intercession</b> for sins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>x</i><sup>1</sup> if <u>not unto death</u></li> <li>• <i>y</i><sup>1</sup> will be heard and</li> <li>• <i>z</i> <i>God will give life</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Intercession</b> for sins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>x</i><sup>2</sup> if unto death</li> <li>• <i>y</i><sup>2</sup> is not required</li> </ul>

Source: The author's own work.

As any other prayer, intercessory prayers also have definite limits. John reminds his readers that there is a sin that leads to death and then makes it clear that those who are guilty of such a sin do not deserve intercession (1 Jn 5:16–17). What does John mean by a sin unto death, or a sin leading to death? Scholars have aired various views, for example, that it is a deliberate and wilful sin against God’s command (cf. Floor 2002, p. 168); a grievous sin such as adultery or murder (cf. Schnakenburg, referred to by Bultmann 1973, p. 87);<sup>215</sup> or any sin that leads to final separation from God (Brooke 1912, p. 145). However, taken within the immediate context of the true testimony of the Holy Spirit (ch. 5), sin unto death rather involves a rejection of the testimony of the Spirit, that is, the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (cf. Campbell 2017, p. 167). Taken within the context of the entire homily, this sin can be pinned to apostasy from the true faith in Christ and acceptance of heretical doctrines, as propagated by early Gnostics (cf. Bultmann 1973, p. 87) and other false teachers who speak with the spirit of the Antichrist (1 Jn 4:1–6). After all, one who rejects Christ as the Son of God also rejects him as Advocate before God, and thereby forfeits any possibility of the intercession of Christ before God. In fact, such a sinner also forfeits any possibility of his sins to be forgiven because of Christ’s atoning death. Moreover, rejection of Christ is also rejection of God’s grace in Christ and rejection of the life He brings. As stated in 1 John 5:12: ‘Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life’.

So, once again as in the previous passages, John in this pericope teaches that prayer, and more specifically intercession for others, requires confidence before God. The confidence that is required is the confidence of faith in the truth about Jesus Christ as witnessed by the Holy Spirit. This faith is required for both the subject and the object of the intercession. This means that the truth about Jesus Christ as the Son of God should be embraced by the one who is praying and also by the person for whose sin he is interceding before God. Faith in Jesus Christ, or not, lies at the base of the distinction between sin unto death and sin not unto death. Stated differently: *Koinonia* of faith is presupposed for meaningful intercession by a believer for a brother who has sinned. By rejecting the truth of Jesus Christ, a sinner forfeits the privilege of depending on the intercession of fellow sinners. That is why John does not say that he forbids such a prayer, only that he ‘do[es] not say that you should pray about that’ (1 Jn 5:16).

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215. Bultmann regards this passage as contra-Christian belief and considers it a later addition to the text by a classical redactor (1973, pp. 86–87). However, there is no concrete evidence that this passage was a later addition.

## ■ Conclusion

In the two passages in which John in his epistles deals with the matter of prayer – viz. 1 John 3:21–22 and 1 John 5:13–17 – he makes use of the prayer-words αἰτεῖν/αἰτήμα and ἐρωτᾶν. By using these words, John shows that he does not have in mind prayers of worship but prayers of asking. An important point made in both passages in 1 John is that petitions before God should be made with *παρησία*, which means (1) confidence to approach God in prayer, and also (2) assurance that God will hear the prayer and give what is asked.

Confidence in prayer is linked to three concepts that are continued throughout 1 John, viz. (1) faith in the truth about Jesus, (2) the *koinonia* (fellowship) of the believers with God and (3) observance of God's commands.

Firstly, confidence in prayer is directly related to the soundness of faith held by the believer. Faith that embraces the witness of the Holy Spirit as the truth, and hence believes that Jesus is the Son of God who gives us eternal life, pleases God. Accordingly, such faith is the basis of the confidence whereby believers approach God in prayer.

Secondly, confidence in prayer is also linked to the obedience of the one who prays. God is pleased by those who do what He commands, in faith and in love. Hence, the believer who honestly tries to keep God's commands is confident that he does not stand condemned before God and therefore may with confidence approach God in prayer.

Moreover, the confidence with which believers pray to God is based on their assurance that, as his children, they have *koinonia* with him through the Holy Spirit. The fact that God abides in us through his Spirit and we are his children, born from him and living in him, provides confidence to approach our Father and ask from him in our prayers. We may even intercede for a fellow believer who has sinned before God. We can be confident that God will hear such intercessions on the basis of Jesus as the highest Advocate for our sins before the Father. However, should a sinner reject the truth that Jesus is the Son of God and our Advocate before the Father, there is no basis for pleading for forgiveness before God. As long as the sinner perseveres in their sin, it remains impossible for them to return to life. Their sin leads to death.

So, although 1 John contains relatively few references to prayer, it makes an important contribution to the NT's teaching about the prayers of believers. As such, it teaches of prayers of faith, *koinonia* and obedience. It teaches of a confidence that comes from Jesus Christ and embraces him as the Son of God, in whom we have eternal life.

# Divine worship: Prayers from the book of Revelation

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## ■ Introduction

The book of Revelation (hereafter Revelation), also perceived as the apocalypse, was most probably written during 90–100 CE (Beale 1999, p. 4; Moloney 2019, p. 3; Thompson 1992, p. 46) and dispatched to the churches (Rv 2; 3) located in Asia Minor – today known as western Turkey (cf. Brickle 2011, p. 1). This remarkable vision, so rich in imagery, that was communicated to John on Patmos (Rv 1:9) and which he chronicled has often puzzled interpreters. Consequently, Revelation has been perceived in various ways, varying from considering it ‘as a document relevant to only its first-century context, a prophetic future eschatological event, a literalistic blueprint of human history, to a tapestry of principles irrespective of time conditioning’ (Fee 2014, p. 24). The genre or literary type of Revelation could not be delimited to a single type. For Gordon Fee (2014, pp. 24–30; cf. Koester 2014, p. 102), ‘the book contains elements of apocalyptic (relating to features of “unveiling”), epistolary (relating to an epistle or letter), and prophetic literature’ (relating to Old Testament [OT] prophecies). Reddish (2020, pp. 73–85) excellently summarises the genre ‘that Revelation is an

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apocalypse, written by a Christian prophet, sent as a quasi-letter to the churches of Asia Minor' (see also Bauckham 1993, p. 2; Grabiner 2013, pp. 24–33; Moloney 2019, p. 7).

Although Revelation emphasises the close relationship between the exalted Jesus and God, it certainly is no less Jewish in character (Rv 2:9; 3:9). Quite significantly, John seems to be overwhelmingly familiarised with the contemporary Jewish world. This deems it impossible to conceive its message separately from it.<sup>216</sup> Revelation demonstrates hardly any sign of separating from the Jewish tradition – even though written in Asia Minor and partaking in socio-religious conflict with the Roman Empire.<sup>217</sup> This discloses to what extent the developing Christian identity in the diaspora was rooted within Jewish heredities (Blackwell, Goodrich & Maston 2019, p. 12).

To contextualise the issues of the Christian congregations in Asia Minor (chs. 2 and 3),<sup>218</sup> the following questions can be raised: How does Revelation characterise the Christian community and its internal dynamics regarding 'that community's relationship to local Jewish communities and the dominant culture of the imperial world?' (Koester 2014, pp. 85–86; cf. Moloney 2019, p. 8).

In Revelation, *on the one side*, the remote past (cf. Rv 13:8) is exposed as an era of frontal conflict between worshipping God and allegiance to powers, prompted from behind the Roman Empire. *On the other side*, the present is disclosed as a period when the Lamb's followers are called to uncompromising faithfulness (Blackwell et al. 2019, p. 13). They faced a variety of issues, embracing 'conflict with outsiders, internal disputes over accommodating Greco-Roman religious practices, and the problem of

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216. Cf. Bauckham (1993, p. 4), referring to John, who 'saw himself, not only as one of the Christian prophets, but also as standing in the tradition of Old Testament prophecy'. See also the publications of Moyise (2020) and Alu and Oladosu (2016) for the use of the Old Testament in Revelation.

217. Although the emperor cult was widely spread since the time of Augustus, little evidence occurs for alleged persecution being secured to non-participation under Domitian. Granting, the existence of evidence still alludes to the reality 'of the emperor cult in Asia Minor throughout the first century' (Cowan 2005, p. 307). For Hardin (2014, p. 239), the Augustus cult was strongly present in Asia Minor during the late first century. According to Tenney (1965, p. 324), 'there is no specific record in the Roman historians of a wholesale concerted persecution of Christians in this period, but there can be little doubt that the social and religious atmosphere of the empire was becoming increasingly unfavourable and that in some localities Christians were brought to trial and martyred for their faith'. Tenney also suggests that Christians were heavily taxed and no vehemently organised persecution occurred due to their uncommitted emperor worship. For Koester (2014, p. 102), 'the social setting was complex, and the book's visions take the full range of issues into account when calling readers to renewed faithfulness to God, Christ, and the Christian community'.

218. See Moloney (2019, p. 8; cf. Bauckham 2003, pp. 13–17) for an excellent discussion on the recipients of Revelation.

complacency due to wealth' (Koester 2014, p. 86). This occurred during economically attractive, yet deceitful, changes (chs. 2–3, 13–14, 18).

It is also evident that the issues involved predominantly social life patterns over a period of time instead of specific events. Some encounters, obviously, emerged from disputes with non-Christians, while others were more discerning. These arguments involved variances among Christians about their distinctive beliefs, contradictory to the beliefs of the broader society (Moloney 2019, p. 8). The close relationship established between the Lamb and his followers expresses in a way how the symbols and motifs, adopted by John from ancient Jewish texts, function: they can be comprehended as inherent reflections on the world the people of God inhabited (Blackwell et al. 2019, p. 13). For these reasons, the various prayers in Revelation have been incorporated by John.

Therefore, the *objective* of this research will be to focus on some recurring perspectives emerging from the prayer corpus in Revelation and to elaborate on the theological contribution of this corpus regarding prayer. Consequently, the *modus operandi* will be (1) an overview of the occurrences of prayer, hymns and worship in the genre of prayer in Revelation; (2) an analysis of each prayer individually, pointing out the distinctive perspectives of the prayer – pointing out those who participated in prayer, hymns and worship and the picturing of God and Christ in it; and (3) a convergence of some distinctive perspectives to formulate selected theological aspects of the prayer corpus.

## ■ An overview of the occurrence of prayer, hymns, and worship in Revelation

In Revelation, three modes of prayer occur to form a trilogy<sup>219</sup> of prayer: the three explicit references to prayer [προσευχή],<sup>220</sup> hymns (ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν, Rv 15:3; λέγω in most of the other texts)<sup>221</sup> and worship [προσκυνέω]<sup>222</sup> complement one another. In this chapter, all three modes will semantically

219. Definition: 'A series of three dramas or literary works [...] that are closely related and develop a single theme' (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2020).

220. The *noun* προσευχή [prayer] occurs explicitly only in Revelation 5:8 and 8:3–4. The use of λέγω is interpreted as 'pray' in Revelation 22:20. Ἀμήν [Amen] occurs nine times (Rv 21:20, 21; 19:4; 7:12 [2×]; 5:14; 3:14; 1:6–7) in Revelation.

221. Osborne (2010, p. 265) refers to these hymns as 'prayer-choruses' (Rv 4:8, 11; 5:9–10, 12, 13; 7:10, 12; 11:15, 17–18; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–2, 3, 5, 6–8).

222. The *verb* προσκυνέω [worship] occurs in Revelation 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 9:20; 11:1, 16; 13:4 (2×); 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11; 15:4; 16:2; 19:4; 10 (2×); 19:20; 20:4; and 22:8, 9. Nowhere in the New Testament does this *verb* occur so repeatedly as in Revelation. Almost half of the occurrences in the New Testament are in Revelation (Cowan 2005, p. 297).

be incorporated in the genre of prayer. Songs and worship directed to God can be regarded as prayer. Even exclamations directed to God, where the verb λέγω has been used, have been translated in the NIV as singing/songs (e.g. Rv 4:8; 5:12, 13; 7:10, 12; 11:15, 17). The following will be a brief orientation regarding the occurrence of prayer, hymns and worship that relate semantically to the genre of 'PRAYER'.

## ■ Worship

Revelation is certainly not only about final judgements and the destruction of evil. One of the sub-themes is 'worship-songs-prayer'. Therefore, the statement by Thompson (1990, p. 53) that 'the language of worship plays an important role in unifying the book' is because, for him, the worship scenes cannot be limited to 'interludes'. They expand the message of Revelation beyond the visions of 'things to come'. Each worship scene carries readers into the 'very presence of God and lift them above events to the almighty Lord' (Osborne 2002, p. 46; also, Nakhro 2001, pp. 165-168). Ross (2006, p. 473) articulates the worship in Revelation as 'it is the vision of glory<sup>223</sup> that inspires the people of God to persevere in their faith', and it is, furthermore, 'this glimpse of glory' that 'also inspires and directs the people of God in their worship here on Earth which foreshadows heavenly worship'.<sup>224</sup>

Worship in Revelation occurs constantly to be a heavenly event, contrary to the reverence of emperor worship.<sup>225</sup> The celestial settings picture how both angels and humans worshipped God in bowing before God. On Earth, it is an antidote and alternative to the imperial cult<sup>226</sup> (Osborne 2002, p. 46). This orientation can be verified by mentioning that the verb προσκυνέω [worship] is mentioned in scenes where the Lamb or God is

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223. *Glory*-references in the prayers manifest 'who God is', 'what God does' and how the Christian readers experience all this. See the last sub-section on the 'Theological perspectives regarding prayer', where this is spelled out more systematically.

224. Christian believers on Earth can learn significantly how divine veneration is conducted in Heaven and consequently pursue the model of the redeemed. Their worship includes 'acclamations of praise and thanks, *songs, prayers*, response to the revelation of God, silence in anticipation of the intervention of God, and celebration of the goodness of God' (Nakhro 2002, pp. 172-176, 180). Craddock (1986, p. 278) regards Revelation as a liturgical book in which proposed readers are invited to participate in God's singing, prayer and worship.

225. The emperor cult was extensive from the time of Augustus, but little evidence occurs of apparent persecution connected with no devotion under Domitian (Cowan 2005, p. 306; Moloney 2019, p. 3).

226. Osborne (2002:46) refers to the publications of Carnegie (1982 pp. 254-256), Ruiz (1997, p. 393), Smith (1998, p. 504) and Kraybill (1999, p. 39) to verify his statement.

worshipped<sup>227</sup> in Heaven (Rv 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 15:4; 19:4; 20:4) and in earthly scenes for worshipping evil powers (Rv 9:20; 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20) (Osborne 2002, p. 46; Ruiz 1992, pp. 657–658).<sup>228</sup>

Therefore, one of the objectives in Revelation is to advise vulnerable Christians that only God is worthy to be worshipped (Peterson 1992, pp. 262–265). This is evident from the four Hallelujah prayer-choruses of Revelation 19:1–10. God is worshipped here for both ‘destroying the evildoers and rewarding the righteous’ (Osborne 2010, p. 265). These two aspects of worship are evident in the prayer-choruses: the character of God (‘the worthiness and majesty of God and the Lamb’) and activities of God (‘vindicating the saints and punishing the sinners’). The final scene (Rv 21:1–22:5) of the new Heaven and new Earth is saturated with worship, enjoying the presence of God. ‘The longings of all of Scripture are fulfilled here’ (Osborne 2010, p. 265).

## ■ Hymns

Aune (1997, p. 314), Smith (1998, p. 501) and Viljoen (2003, pp. 213–237) refer to numerous hymns in Revelation.<sup>229</sup> According to Ford (1998, p. 211) the hymns primarily occur in the narrative parts (chs. 4–19), and ‘all the major events of the book are accompanied by heavenly hymns’. Predominantly, the hymns describe the sovereignty of God with reference to both ‘who God is (power, glory, wisdom, strength, attributes) and how the people of God must respond (honor, praise, thanks)’ (Osborne 2010, p. 265). It seems that the hymns constitute and structure the foundation of worship in Revelation.

All the hymns in Revelation focus on the throne of God. The songs that delineate salvation and deliverance echo themes, imagery and language from the OT.<sup>230</sup> John contextualised those themes to inspire the readers to endure in their faithfulness (Hardin 2014, p. 241).

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227. Both God and the Lamb reign and should therefore be worshipped as One (Rv 11:15; 22:3). The foundation for this type of monotheism is the belief that God carries out God’s power through Jesus. This involves all those who worship Jesus also worship God (cf. Bauckham 1993, pp. 118–119; Hurtado 2003, pp. 590–595; Koester 2015, p. 2).

228. Cowan (2005, p. 297) postulates the most fundamental discrepancy in worship – ‘that between true and false worship’.

229. Revelation ‘4:8, 11; 5:9–10, 12, 13; 7:10, 12; 11:15, 17–18; 12:10–12; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–2, 3, 5, 6–8. In addition, one could name 14:3–5; 18:2–3, 4–8, 10, 14, 16, 19–23’ (Osborne 2002, pp. 47–48; also cf. Ford 1998, p. 212).

230. No direct quotes occur from the Old Testament. The illusions and imagery (especially from the Torah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel) borrowed from the Old Testament were applied faithfully to their original meaning (Hardin 2014, p. 240). See also the publications of Moyise (2020) and Alu and Oladosu (2016) for the use of the Old Testament in Revelation.



Each hymn tells a story that includes both God and the Lamb, ‘their mighty attributes and acts, [...] their deliverance of God’s people and judgement of their enemies’. The hymns encompass messages of ‘hope, deliverance, and vindication’ (Hardin 2014, p. 243). The worshippers in Revelation ‘articulate, enumerate, and explain’ why God and the Lamb should be glorified<sup>231</sup> (Hardin 2014, p. 241).

According to Viljoen (2003, p. 233), the hymns throughout function therapeutically. They encourage the readers to continuously anticipate a scenario of the concluding victory. Although antiphonal parts in the hymns are directed to God and the Lamb, they also refer to the readers. The aim is to educate the readers towards an appropriate perspective of the events referred to in the hymns.

## ■ Prayer

A set of prayer-requests occurs in Revelation and are interrelated (προσευχαί, Rv 5:8; ἔκραξαν, Rv 6:9–10; προσευχαῖς, Rv 8:3–4; Λέγει, Rv 22:20). This points out that the prayers of the saints ascend to God. The ‘throne-vision’ in Chapter 5 (cf. also Rv 4:8–11) refers to how the ‘four living creatures’ offered the prayers of the saints<sup>232</sup> (λέγοντες, Rv 5:8). Shortly after that, the martyrs ‘cried out with a loud voice’ in prayer from under the heavenly altar (Rv 6:9–11), and later an angel offers the prayers of the martyrs with incense ‘on the golden altar in front of the throne’ (Rv 8:3–4). The theme of prayer reaches a climax in the last chapter. Jesus enunciates his *Parousia* (Rv 22:7), and in Revelation 22:17 ‘The Spirit and the bride say, “Come”’, with an invitation ‘And let everyone who hears say, “Come”’ (cf. also Rv 22:20; Bauckham 2001, pp. 252–271; Koester 2014, p. 1).

The explicit references to prayer (ἔκραξαν, Rv 6:10; προσευχή, Rv 5:8; 8:3–5) have been made in association with the OT temple ceremonies. In Revelation 5:8, the 24 elders<sup>233</sup> and the four living creatures (Rv 4:4, 6) were holding harps and golden incense bowls. The custom in Temple ceremonies was that when people gather for prayer in the mornings and evenings, sacrifices were conducted. Therefore, it can be deduced that the

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231. Arndt, Danker and Bauer (2000, p. 259) defines δοξάζω contextually as, (1) ‘to influence one’s opinion about another to enhance the latter’s reputation, *praise, honor*’; (2) ‘to cause to have splendid greatness, *clothe in splendor*’.

232. It seems that, for John, the experiences and evidence of the suffering and killing of the ‘saints’ derived from the recent experiences of persecution of Israel under Antiochus IV of Syria. He was probably influenced by the book of Daniel that emerged from those experiences (Aune 1997, p. 357; Moloney 2019, p. 9).

233. In Revelation, the references to ‘elders’ [πρεσβύτεροι] refer to respective leaders and counselors of Jewish and Christian communities (Campbell 1994, cited by Koester). By connecting ‘elders’ with prayer in these contexts, the leaders become examples of prayer and worship and should be imitated (Koester 2015, p. 2).

incense denoted the prayers ascending to God (see Brickle 2011, p. 2). The incense in Revelation 5:8 is labelled with ‘the prayers of the saints’, most likely denoting prayers, in general, for the kingdom of God to arrive (Osborne 2010, p. 651).

The souls of the saints under the altar (Rv 6:9-11) indicate that they ‘had been slaughtered’ for the Lamb. The verb, ἐσφαγμένον, matches with the ‘slain’ [ἐσφαγμένον] of the Lamb in Revelation 5:6. In their suffering they exclaimed in a vehement prayer, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’ (Rv 6:10). They reminded God about his covenant commitments. They ask for vengeance. God should pour out the covenant curses on those who dwell on the earth, who have rejected God and executed his people (Rv 6:10).

Revelation 8:3-5 closely relates to Revelation 6:9-11. Here, ‘another angel’, similar to Revelation 5:8, ‘has a golden incense bowl’. This bowl, now full of incense, contains the ‘prayers of the saints’. As these prayers (probably referred to in Rv 6:10 because of their juxtaposition) ascend to God, God undoubtedly finds these prayers rewarding and consequently judged those ‘who have discarded God and killed his people’ (Rv 6:10). Then, in obedience to the command of God, ‘The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth’ (Rv 8:7). This inaugurated the sevenfold trumpet’s judgements that are in part the response of God to the cursing prayers of the saints for vengeance (Koester 2015, p. 3; Osborne 2010, p. 266).

The final petition-prayer [Λέγει ὁ μαρτυρῶν] occurs in Revelation 22:20. It is probably better to interpret the prayer as inviting the readers to come to Christ (Beale 1999, pp. 1148-1149; Osborne 2002, pp. 793-794, 2010, p. 267). The plea for the return of Christ in Revelation 22:20b [Ἄμην, ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ] is founded on the promise references of the returning soon of Christ in Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:11; 16:15; and 22:7, 12, 20a [Ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ] in addition to the lengthy passage, referring to his *Parousia* (Rv 19:11-21; Osborne 2010, p. 267).

## ■ An analysis of the various worship, song and prayer-passages

In this section, the following texts from Revelation, with references to worship, songs, and prayer, will be discussed: Revelation 4:8-11 (glory and honour to God as the Creator); 5:7-14 (blessing, honour, glory to God and the Lamb as Saviour); 6:9-11 (prayer to God, the Righteous One); 7:9-12 (blessing, glory, wisdom [...] to God); 8:3-5 (prayers of the saints); 11:15-18 (God will reign for ever and ever); 15:3-4 (Song of the Lamb as praise to

God's majesty); 16:5–7 (true and righteous judgements of Lord God Almighty); 19:1–8 (God praised for his true and just judgements for God is almighty and reigns); and 22:20–21 (A prayer asking Jesus to come).

## ■ **Glory and honour to God as the Creator (Rv 4:8–11)**

Revelation 4–5 discusses a setting where God and the Lamb are worshipped in the heavenly throne-room. The vision refers to God sitting on his throne. John uses traditional Jewish lyrics and early Christian themes that have been adapted to his contemporary literary contexts. Therefore, those who identify with these heavenly worshippers identify themselves with traditional Israelite worship (Koester 2015, p. 1).

The prayer in Revelation 4:11a inaugurates the elders praising God, which is closely analogous to the prayer in Revelation 5:12–13. Here, reference is made to God as the one worthy of receiving the attribution of worship and power due to the completion of God's creative work. The foundation of this worship is twofold: (1) The 'creation' of God is founded exclusively 'on his will and proceeds from it', and (2) the 'power' of God became exposed through creation. This is confirmed and acknowledged via the beings God created – now, worshipping God (Beale 1999, p. 335).

In this passage, John uses two figures of style to make an impact on the readers. Firstly, he refers to the unceasing occurrence of these prayers. This is denoted by the reference 'day and night' (Rv 4:8) to form a hendiadys,<sup>234</sup> referring to a 24-hour day. This would mean 'without ceasing' or 'without interruption'. Secondly, as in Isaiah 6:3, a *Qěduššah* occurs ('Holy, holy, holy'; Rv 4:8). The function of the *Qěduššah* in Revelation, according to Aune (1997, p. 306), is to present a firm preamble for pronouncing the divine name (Lord God Almighty).<sup>235</sup> This threefold title articulates the concept 'Lord God Almighty' that refers to 'divine infinity and sovereignty over history' (Beale 1999, p. 332; also, Viljoen 2003, pp. 222–223). The significance of the second title in this passage, 'the one who is and was and is coming' is to compliment the first title and 'to emphasize that the God who transcends time is sovereign over history' (Beale 1999, p. 333). John's intention in using these titles is to provide supra-historical (above-historical) perspectives of 'the one who is, was, and is coming'. This would have enabled the suffering readers to understand the eternal purpose of God

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234. According to Aune (1997, p. 302; also, Easley 1998, p. 78), '[t]he hendiadys "day and night" occurs several times in Revelation (7:15; 12:10; 14:11; 20:10) and frequently in the [Old Testament] and early Jewish and early Christian literature'.

235. Cf. Aune (1997, pp. 304–307) for a thorough reference to how widely the *Qěduššah* featured in antiquity.

and, hence, encourage them ‘to persevere faithfully through tribulations’ (Beale 1999, p. 333).

## ■ Blessing, honour, glory to God and the Lamb as Saviour (Rv 5:7-14)

In Revelation 5:8-11, Jesus Christ is portrayed as the Lamb of God. His unique sacrifice was to redeem the people in this world from sin. Therefore, only he, the Lamb, is worthy, with God the Father, of universal worship (MacLeod 2007, p. 456).

The content of these verses (Rv 5:7-14) revolves around the worthiness of ‘the Lamb who was slain’ (v. 12).<sup>236</sup> Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, moved towards the throne to take a scroll from God the Father, seated on the throne (v. 7). Nobody in the whole universe (v. 13) was found worthy to open the scroll, a testament or will. This testament contains the heritage promised to the Messiah and his followers, namely, the millennial kingdom. The Lamb was the only one found worthy of breaking the seals. This action would have signified the Lamb’s authority to perform judgement and to inaugurate the millennial kingdom on the earth.

When the Lamb takes the scroll, it causes a remarkable response of worship. This is the event that every part of creation and all the people of God have been waiting for since grief and distress became part of the world. Via this act, the enemies of God will be conquered, the Antichrist abolished, the devil defeated, death overthrown, the curse lifted and the new Heaven and Earth will be established (MacLeod 2007, p. 457).

This is the beginning of the great chorus of praise and can be divided into three parts: ‘(1) the “new song” of the living creatures and the elders (Rv 5:9-10), (2) the song (or chant) of the angelic multitude (Rv 5:11-12),<sup>237</sup> and (3) the song of the entire created universe (Rv 5:13)’ (MacLeod 2007, p. 460). It declares the approbation of the worthiness of the Lamb. Here the new song of the elders, the angels and the creatures relates to the new and greater liberation that God is about to establish on Earth. The adjective, *καινός* [new], means new in quality, different, better than the old.<sup>238</sup> With the sacrifice of the Lamb, a new covenant has been established. The new

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236. This scene is equivalent to the one in Daniel 7:13-14.

237. According to the hymn of angels, the Lamb is worthy to receive seven great prerogatives. (1) *Power* [δύναμιν]; (2) *wealths* [πλοῦτον]; (3) *wisdom* [σοφίαν]; (4) *might* [ἰσχύν]; (5) *honour* [τιμὴν]; (6) *glory* [δόξαν]; and (7) *blessing* [εὐλογίαν] (cf. MacLeod 2007, pp. 467-468).

238. Arndt et al. (2000, p. 497) define it as ‘pert[aining] to that which is recent in contrast to someth[ing] old’.

song 'is one of thanksgiving for the redemption Christ has accomplished and will accomplish' (MacLeod 2007, p. 460).

Here the worshipping of the Lamb is perfect evidence of his full divinity (MacLeod 2007, p. 469). The three hymns in Revelation 5:9–13, in which the Lamb is worshipped, emphasise the divinity of Jesus more than most other passages in the New Testament (NT). In Revelation 4:11 and 5:13, the Lamb is equally addressed as God, particularly in the phrase 'you are worthy' (Rv 4:11; Beale 1999, p. 358).<sup>239</sup>

When this prayer closes with the four living creatures saying 'Amen!', 'the twenty-four elders (12 tribes and 12 apostles), representing the redeemed and glorified church, "fell down and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever"' (Rv 5:14; MacLeod 2007, pp. 469–470).

## ■ Prayer to God, the Righteous One (Rv 6:9–11)

This passage describes the events around the witnesses beneath the altar (Rv 6:9) – they picture 'the praying community' pleading for revenge against the earthly inhabitants. They are entitled to be witnesses for the people of the earth. Their identity as witnesses becomes evident through their continuous prophetic involvement with the unbelieving world. This happens because of the righteous space of God for repentance (Bauckham 1993, pp. 273–283, 2011, pp. 263–266).

John then expresses the reaction of God through visions to ensure the readers that unrighteousness will not prevail indefinitely. Initially, the prayer of these witnesses demarcates the existence of two groups of people in the world: the witnesses (the martyrs) and the perpetrators. The people on Earth will be given another chance to repent. God will keep them alive (Koester 2014, p. 5), even though they will decline repentance (Rv 16:9, 11). The prayers are eventually answered when the beast, an ally of Babylon, finally destroys Babylon, the city 'drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus' (Rv 17:7). The righteousness of God is consummated when Babylon becomes its own prey because of its own viciousness.

Readers who identify with this prayer of righteousness must likewise equate themselves with the pursuit of those who prayed it: they are witnesses on behalf of humanity. Although God is righteous, God postponed the final judgement on behalf of the world so that God's people can live according to their witnesses, their identity, and consequently invite the

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239. 'The elaborate description of "binitarian" worship in Revelation 5 surely was intended to reinforce in the strongest terms the early Christian practice of including Jesus [the Son] with God [the Father] as recipients of worship on earth' (Hurtado 2003, p. 593).

world to repent. The purpose of the righteousness of God is not the annihilation of the earthly inhabitants but the refining of the earth from the powers that ruin it (Rv 11:18). The reaction of God to the exclamation, ‘How long?’, finally encompasses righteousness for all the victims oppressed by Babylon. Readers, then, should view their distinctiveness as witnesses, accordingly (Bauckham 2002, p. 263; Koester 2014, p. 6).

## ■ Blessing, glory, wisdom ... to God (Rv 7:9-12)

In this pericope, two prayers (Rv 7:10, 12) from two different groups arise. John, as in the previous cases, starts to introduce the participants in the worshipping prayers of God and the Lamb.

A clear integrity and pattern occur in this passage. Firstly, there is a normal introductory formula: ‘After these things I looked, [or saw, εἶδον]’ (Rv 7:9).<sup>240</sup> Then *two scenes* are referred to which are contrasting but analogous in form. *Scene One* refers to earthly personnel, ‘a great multitude’. They are then described in detail (Rv 7:9–10a). They were uncountable, ‘from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages’ (Rv 7:9), and ‘have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (Rv 7:14). This great multitude stood in front of the throne, crying out loudly, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.’ According to Aune (1998, p. 470) can the noun σωτηρία in this context be associated with salvation in the sense of ‘deliverance’ or ‘victory’ over persecution?

The *second scene* lists three different groups of heavenly beings: ‘the angels, who stood around the throne, then the elders, and finally the four living creatures’ (Aune 1998, p. 470). ‘They fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God’ (Rv 7:11). It ends likewise, as a hymn of praise, with a repeated ‘Amen’ (Rv 7:12). Both references, to the ‘throne’ and the ‘Lamb’, in these two scenes, denote that divine presence is the focus (Kelley 1986, p. 289).

The content of the worship of God encompasses seven doxological attributes: ‘Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might’ (Rv 7:12). But already in Revelation 5:12, John assigned a related list of seven attributes to the Lamb. Four of the attributes used in this doxology [εὐλογία, σοφία, εὐχαριστία, ἰσχύς] are only repeated in the doxologies in Revelation 4:9 and 5:12. The acknowledgement of wisdom

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240. This is familiar throughout the book (Rv 4:1; 5:1, 11; 6:1, 2, 5, 8, 12; 7:9; 8:13; 14:1, 14; 15:5) and in apocalyptic literature in general.

received from God, assigned to the Lamb, occurs solely here in Revelation 5:12<sup>241</sup> (Aune 1998, p. 471).

## ■ Prayers of the saints (Rv 8:3-5)

In this passage, Revelation 8:3-4 elucidates the distinctiveness of the worship emerging from the saints. This anticipates the future event when the faith community on Earth will unite with the ‘heavenly creatures’ and ‘elders’ to worship God. These liberated people came from every tribe and nation. In this text reference, they have left behind their earthly suffering and are ‘standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands’. They thank God and the Lamb for salvation (cf. Rv 7:9-12). At the end of the play, the multitude became quiet (Rv 8:1) for an angel to offer a prayer. These prayers came from the saints who are still suffering on Earth (Rv 7:9-8:4; Koester 2014, p. 3).

Then it seems as if the prayers for support will be solved with vengeance. After the angel offered the prayers, ‘the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth’ (Rv 8:5) as a sign of destruction. However, the plague scenery did not change at all with God’s revenge, even though it was righteous. The unrighteousness just continues. Even after hail and fire emanated, ‘mixed with blood, and [...] hurled to the earth,’<sup>242</sup> and a third of the earth was burned up’, still the unbelievers did not repent<sup>243</sup> (Rv 8:7-9:2; Koester 2014, p. 5).

## ■ God will reign for ever and ever (Rv 11:15-18)

This passage also refers to two groups worshipping God (Rv 11:15, 17, 18) and ‘his Messiah’ (Rv 11:15) in prayer: the first group, the ‘loud voices in Heaven’ (Rv 11:15), and the second group, the ‘twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God’ (Rv 11:16). The phrase, ‘in Heaven’ [ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ], locates the environment where the seer hears the voices.<sup>244</sup> This would suggest that these hymns are audible in the heavenly court only (Aune 1998, p. 638). Their song’s theme of victory encompasses the

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241. Aune (1998, p. 471) also points out where the related phrase, ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν [our God], appears in Revelation ‘4:11; 5:10; 7:10, 12; 12:10 [2×]; 19:1, 5, 6’.

242. According to the world image in antiquity.

243. Revelation 8:7-9:2 refers to the destruction in terms of the blowing of the seven trumpets.

244. The identical prepositional phrase [ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ] also appears in Revelation 12:10 and 19:1, where it indicates the heavenly perception of the seer.

kingship or rule of God. This verb, 'reign' [βασιλευεῖν], occurs three times<sup>245</sup> in Revelation, where God is the subject. 'The hymnic phrase here in 11:15 emphasises the eternal nature of God's reign' (Aune 1998, pp. 639–640): 'The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'

The second song, also a collective song of thanksgiving, occurs in Revelation 11:17–18. Again, the 24 elders that encircled the throne of God prostrate themselves and worship God in response to the heavenly proclamation of Revelation 11:15. They thank God for consummating the kingdom. This signifies to the completed configuration of God's kingdom (Rv 11:18). All the enemies of God have finally been defeated and judged and 'the servants of God rewarded' (cf. Beale 1999, p. 612). In thanking God, the elders address God with a significant variation of the threefold name they attributed to God in Revelation 1:4, 8 and 4:8 (Beale 1999, p. 612). God is the God of the past ('who was'), the present ('who is'), and the future ('who is coming'). This God who transcends time, who influences and directs the entire course of history, is also amidst history and invisibly guiding it (also cf. Rv 1:4, 8). The addition of the title 'Lord God Almighty' complements this awareness.<sup>246</sup>

The last part of the threefold clause in Revelation 11:17, is an expansion clause: 'because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign'. This signifies that the last part of the triadic name for God refers particularly to the end-time when God will break into world history. God will 'end it by overthrowing all opposition to his people and setting up his eternal kingdom' (Beale 1999, pp. 613–614).

## ■ 'Song of the Lamb' as praise to God's majesty (Rv 15:3–5)

This song resumes the theme of the final judgement from Chapter 14. It depicts both the defeat of the beast as completed and the saints as enjoying the outcomes of that victory. They worship God for it. According to Revelation 15:4 'all the nations will come and worship before you [God] because you have manifested your judgments' once and for all (Beale 1999, p. 789). These saints partake in the victory only because the Lamb has conquered the beast and granted them a share in the effects of his victory (cf. Rv 4:6; 5:5–6, 9–10). Therefore, the Lamb is praised in Revelation 15:3.

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245. All three occurrences are in hymnic contexts, closely similar to the usages in Revelation 11:17 and 19:6 (cf. Aune 1998, pp. 639–640).

246. The prophets used this title repetitively to refer to God as the one who sovereignly directs the history of his people (cf. also Rv 1:8).



He has defeated the opponents of his followers and provided to his followers ultimate victory over the world (Beale 1999, p. 790).

The song of the saints is a hymn comprising their deliverance and their praise of some attributes of God: ‘Lord God Almighty [...] just and true [...] you alone are holy’ (Rv 15:3–4). The song here is about the much greater deliverance (in comparison with that of Moses) accomplished through the redemptive work of the Lamb. Therefore, it is called the ‘song of the Lamb’ (Beale 1999, p. 792).

The true and great acts of this sovereign God, as described in Revelation 15:3b, serve as the motivation that people should fear and glorify God. This God is to be worshipped as ‘the Almighty [...] just and true’ ‘because (ὅτι) only’ God alone is ‘holy’ (here, the *first* of three ὅτι clauses in Rv 15:4; Beale 1999, p. 796). In the *second* ὅτι clause, ὅτι is to be rendered as ‘so that’ (Arndt et al. 2000, p. 732). This successive rendering of ὅτι denotes the effect of the incomparable holiness of God that ‘All nations will come and worship before you’ (Rv 15:4b). This declares and constitutes the basis for worshipping God. The *third* ὅτι clause in Revelation 15:4 is poetically equivalent to the first one, similarly providing a reason why people should ‘fear and glorify’ God. Both the first and third ὅτι clauses in Revelation 15:4 instrumentally provide the fundamental point of the praise of the saints: that God should be feared and be glorified. This is the pivotal point of Verses 2–4 (Beale 1999, p. 797).

## ■ True and righteous judgements of Lord God Almighty (Rv 16:4–7)

In Revelation 16:5 ‘the angel of the waters’ [τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων] sanctions the aforementioned reasoning so far, announcing that God is ‘righteous’. This righteousness of God is substantiated (ὅτι [because]) in the reference and fact that God has ‘judged these things’, referring to ‘the third bowl as divine judgment’ (Beale 1999, p. 817). The use of ‘Holy’ [ἅγιος] (Rv 16:5)<sup>247</sup> here may be semantically synonymous with the preceding use of ‘righteous’ [δίκαιος] (Rv 16:5).<sup>248</sup> God has evidenced God’s self to be righteous and holy when God commenced with executing end-time judgement (Beale 1999, p. 817). John’s use of the threefold formula [κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ] also designates that God’s act of judgement validates the sovereignty of God over history (Beale 1999, p. 818).

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247. Arndt et al. (2000, p. 728) define it as ‘without fault relative to deity’.

248. It is probably used here as a ground formula or ground clause, which refers to a formula without variables. It is the use of the two words in synonymous parallelism. This then implies that ἅγιος not only supports ‘righteous’ but also the reference, ‘the holy one’ (cf. Beale 1999, p. 817).

The declaration of the righteousness and holiness of God (Rv 16:5) is founded on God's judgement of persecutors (Beale 1999, p. 818). The mentioning of the 'altar' together with the 'judgements' of God, being 'true and righteous', are complemented further by the two references already observed in Revelation 16:5b, 'You are just, O Holy One, who are and were, for you have judged these things'. Even the following two references also verify this statement: 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge' (Rv 6:10) and 'true and righteous are your judgments' (Rv 16:7) (Beale 1999, p. 820). This prayer prepares the readers for the judgement section in the following two chapters, Revelation 17-18.

## ■ God praised for God's true and just judgements for God is almighty and reigns (Rv 19:1-8)

Both the Hallelujah choruses in Revelation 19:1-8 cause a transition from closing the judgement section (chs. 17-18) and inaugurate the final events of the eschaton (chs. 19-22). They are responses to the decree to celebrate in considering the divine justice that was revenge for how Babylon treated the saints (Rv 18:20). The first five verses (Rv 19:1-5) constitute the *first scene*, referring to the worshipping of God for the justice of the judgements of God. This scene consists of two hymns. In the *first* hymn (Rv 19:1-2), the heavenly multitude<sup>249</sup> worships God for his judgement of the great whore (ch. 17) and for his revenge of 'the blood of his servants' (cf. also Rv 6:9-11; Osborne 2002, p. 49). The *second* hymn (Rv 19:3; also cf. Rv 14:10-11) reflects the 'great multitude in Heaven' praising God for the eternal torment of the great whore.

A Hallelujah chorus in Revelation 19:6-8 inaugurates the *second scene*, with a similar beginning as the preceding scene: 'Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude'<sup>250</sup> (Rv 19:1, 6; Yeatts 2003, pp. 352-353). After the references to the judgements in the first scene, the 24 elders and four living creatures call upon the earthly servants of God to participate with the heavenly choir in praising [αἰνέω] God (Rv 19:5). It reflects *positively*<sup>251</sup> on the *Parousia* of Christ, justifying those dedicated to God as the bride of Christ (Rv 19:6-8). The hymn itself praises both God's reign

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249. Although the 'great multitude' here may refer to an angelic multitude (Rv 5:11-12; 7:11-12; 12:10; see also Heb 12:22), the reference to salvation and the blood of the servants of God makes it more likely that they refer to the faithful in heaven 'who have come out of the great tribulation' (Rv 7:9-10; 13:17; 15:2-5) (Yeatts 2003, p. 351).

250. Although this 'multitude' is not identified in both these verses (Rv 19:1, 6), the multitude is most probably the 144,000, which are similarly described in Revelation 14:1-2 (Yeatts 2003, pp. 352-353).

251. The second part negatively pictures Jesus as the divine warrior who destroys the sinners in the final battle (Rv 19:11-21).

(Rv 19:6b) and the declaration of ‘the wedding of the Lamb’ and the church as the bride (Rv 19:6–8) (Osborne 2002, p. 49). The first reason for the instruction to praise God issued by the great multitude is that ‘the Lord our God the Almighty *reigns*’ (Rv 19:6). The theme of the sovereignty of God echoes the thrust of Verses 1–3, where the emphasis was on God’s *judgement* of the great whore and the announcement of the *blessing* of the kingdom of God. The noun ‘Almighty’ [παντοκράτωρ], literally means, in this context, that God controls all (Yeatts 2003, pp. 352–353).

The four Hallelujah prayer-choruses<sup>252</sup> in Revelation 19:1–8 add emphasis to the instruction issued by the great multitude to praise God. In these Hallelujah prayer-choruses, God is praised for both demolishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous. These two aspects of worship are evident in the prayer-choruses: ‘who God is (the worthiness and majesty of God and the Lamb), and what God does (defending the saints and punishing the sinners)’ (Osborne 2010, p. 264). The *first Hallelujah* praise of God occurs in Revelation 19:1. The reason for worshipping God is that ‘his judgments are true and just’ (Rv 19:2; also cf. Rv 14:8; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; Yeatts 2003, p. 351). This *second Hallelujah* praise occurs in Revelation 19:3, referring to the righteous judgement of God that must also endure forever<sup>253</sup> (Easley 1998, p. 347). These saints join the corporeal universe in worshipping God, with the *third Hallelujah* praise ‘saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!”’<sup>254</sup> (Yeatts 2003, p. 352). The *fourth Hallelujah* praise is another great confession about the sovereignty of God: ‘our Lord God Almighty reigns’. The reign of God is evident in both the death of the great whore (Rv 19:2) and in the marriage of the Lamb (Rv 19:7; Easley 1998, p. 349).

## ■ A prayer asking Jesus to come (Rv 22:20–21)

Revelation closes with a significant prayer of the Christian community: ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!’ (Rv 22:20). Approaching Jesus in prayer here exposes and strengthens the understanding that Jesus intervenes divinely on behalf of the saints. It is idiosyncratic to speak about Jesus in terms of heavenly titles, as to talk to Jesus as if talking with God. When believers mutually do this, then such a prayer promotes an experience of intimacy

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252. Such multi-fold praise is quite common in Revelation (see also three-fold praise in Rv 4:9, 11; seven-fold praise in Rv 5:12; 7:12).

253. Revelation thrice measures out eternal punishment: to the followers of the beast, to the great whore and the ‘unholy trinity’: the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (Rv 14:11; 19:3; 20:10). Wicked humans, wicked organisations and wicked spirits alike will also one day go into eternal destruction (Easley 1998, p. 347).

254. Yeatts (2003, p. 352) points out that the word ἀμήν couples with ἀλληλουϊά to encourage the praise of God (Rv 1:6–7; 5:14; 7:11–12).

with Jesus and with those who communicate together with Jesus (Koester 2015, p. 6).

This prayer promotes both the relations among Christians and distinguishes them as worshippers from other groups. Only the followers of Jesus who believed that Jesus has been resurrected and is alive cast a plea for him to come again. Even the resurrected Jesus refers to himself in the first person as 'I, Jesus' (Rv 22:16) and continually enunciates, 'See, I am coming soon!' (Rv 22:7, 12, 20). A nameless voice invited the readers to participate in prayer to pray: "'Come". And let everyone who hears say, "Come"' (Rv 22:17b). This invitation furnishes them for the conclusive plea to echo: 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!' (Rv 22:20). This plea was probably familiar among the readers. Therefore, John incorporates this reference in the conclusion, followed by the farewell desire that 'The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen' (Rv 22:21).

Nevertheless, this is not the conclusive worship scene. The approaching of the 'new Heaven and new Earth', as depicted in Revelation 21:1–22:5, lacks any worship scene, because the worship of the divine pervades the entire section. Therefore, life on the new Heaven and new Earth will be one glorious experience of worship. Evidently, the fundamental truth and reality is that God will dwell with his people. They will experience the presence of God in the fullest way possible (Rv 21:3; Osborne 2002, p. 49). This then seems to be the climactic prayer of Revelation, surely of the entire Bible (Osborne 2010, p. 267).

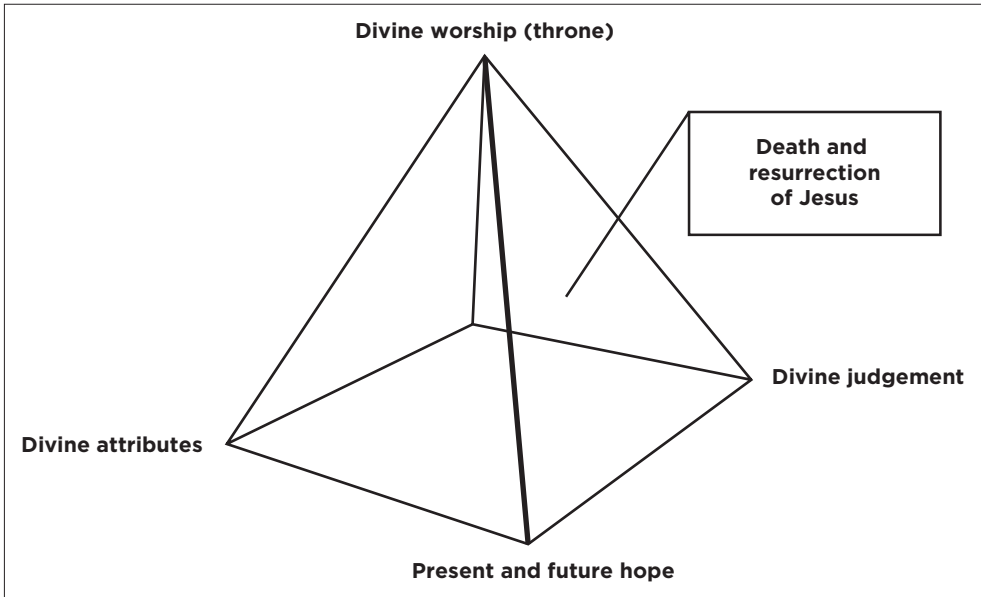
## ■ Some theological perspectives regarding prayer in Revelation

After analysing the three modes of prayer that constitute a trilogy of prayer in Revelation, this section convenes some theological perspectives derived from the various prayers analysed. In the investigation of this 'prayer trilogy', some major aspects have been discerned and in Figure 12.1, diagrammatically constructed in a pyramidal structure to attest their interrelatedness.

The prayers are studded 'with proclamations of the victory of God [...] in and through the slain and risen Lamb'. This reality is the heart of the prayers in Revelation (cf. Moloney 2019, p. 5).<sup>255</sup> The many references to the throne in these prayers function as the primary environment for the worshipping of God and the Lamb. The multiple divine attributes and related divine involvement (works) referred to legitimise the divine worship. Also, throughout the prayers, multiple references occur regarding righteous

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255. See Revelation 5:6, 9–14, 7:12–8:1; 11:15–19; 16:17–21; 18:20–24; 19:1–8, 17–21; 20:11–15; 21:1–22:5.



Source: Author's own work.

**FIGURE 12.1:** The foundational theological components of prayer in Revelation.

divine judgement. Although the noun ἐλπίς<sup>256</sup> and the verb ἐλπίζω<sup>257</sup> do not occur in Revelation, it became evident from the prayers that present and future ‘hope’ should also be acknowledged, for it should play a fundamental role in the lives of the readers.

## ■ Death and resurrection of Jesus

According to Moloney (2019, p. 9), the heart of the message of Revelation is ‘the perennial presence of the reality of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and its saving effects’. It discloses the sense of the history of the involvement of God in the matters of humankind. Revelation is to be read as a sound declaration and reaffirmation of the redeeming effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is particularly evident and accentuated in the prayer corpus discussed. It appeals to live (a life of discipleship) through ‘challenge, conflict, suffering, and failure, in the light of the victory of the Lamb’ (Moloney 2019, p. 10). Such history is documented in the Jewish and the Christian community epochs – a sacred history. This message is reiterated multiple times to

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256. Arndt et al. (2000, p. 319) translate ἐλπίς as ‘expectation, hope’.

257. Arndt et al. (2000, p. 319) ‘to look forward to someth[ing], with implication of confidence about someth[ing] coming to pass, hope, hope for’.

reveal [ἀποκάλυψις] the inclusive meaning of the enduring manifestation of the redemption of God in and through Jesus Christ (Moloney 2019, p. 10).

## ■ Divine worship

Divine worship is the principal focus of all three modes of prayer. Only God is worthy of worship. The foundation of this statement is fourfold: (1) God is supreme *holiness* (Rv 4:8c, ‘holy, holy, holy’). (2) All the songs and worship direct and relate theologically to the *sovereignty* of God: God, indubitably, created everything and everything is under the management of God. In Revelation 4:11, God is worshipped for God’s acts of all creation. (3) God is additionally designated as the *eternal* one, ‘who lives forever and ever’. (4) God is also worshipped for God’s *righteous judgement*.

God is the great King over ‘many peoples and nations and languages and kings’ (Rv 10:11). On Earth, kings and dignitaries prostrate themselves and place their crowns before the emperor. In Heaven, the four living creatures and 24 elders prostrate themselves in the presence of God, seated on the throne (cf. Rv 4:10; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4), for God is ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’ (Rv 17:14; Hardin 2014, p. 237). Several times God is praised directly (Rv 4:1; 11:17; 15:3; 16:5; 19:1–8). Occasionally, God is also praised in the third person (Rv 4:8; 7:12; 19:1, 5, 6; Hardin 2014, p. 238). Most of the worship scenes reveal the identity and character of God. Bauckham (1993, pp. 32–33) interprets the worship in Chapter 4 as ‘the two most primary forms of awareness of God: the awed perception of his luminous holiness (Rv 4:8; cf. Is 6:3), and the consciousness of utter dependence on God for existence itself that is the nature of all created things (Rv 4:11)’.

The divine worship in the hymns of Revelation is concentrated on the *throne of God*. The central notion *vis-à-vis* the seals, trumpets and bowls (chs. 4–17) is commenced by the vision of God and the Lamb on the throne. These chapters refer multiple times to this actuality. The hymns refer to God sitting on the throne as the sole ruler (Viljoen 2003, p. 232). The four living creatures around the throne repetitively ‘give glory, honor and thanks to God who sits on the throne’, acclaiming ‘Holy, holy, holy’ without stopping (Rv 4:8, 9). Likewise, the 24 elders seated on the throne, when casting their crowns before the throne, sing their song, ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power’. They worshipped the one seated on the throne ‘Lord God Almighty’ (Rv 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6), ‘our Lord and God’ (Rv 4:11 cf. Rv 7:12; 19:1, 5) and ‘who sits on the throne’ (Rv 7:10; Hardin 2014, p. 237).

Alongside its substantial, though creative, reliance on symbolism and metaphors found in Second Temple Jewish tradition, the prayers in Revelation encompass a 'highly' developed *Christology*. This designates the desire of John to extend to Jesus the worship only attributed to God in the OT. This is evident in Revelation 4:11, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory', and equivalent in Revelation 5:12 (also v. 13), 'Worthy is the Lamb<sup>258</sup> [...] to receive [...] glory'. Both references to Jesus are incorporated to oppose any form of emperor worship. In the heavenly adoration scene in Revelation 5:3-10, the Lion-Lamb is worshipped as God the Saviour. He is the anointed Son of David (cf. Rv 5:5) and the sinless Lamb of God. He alone was endorsed to suffer as the Saviour of humankind. His death and resurrection constitute the foundation of the redemption of people from every nation on Earth. All this verifies why only Jesus is valued worthy 'to take the scroll, and to open its seals' (Rv 5:9; also cf. Rv 5:5; Osborne 2002, p. 47). After this only 'he will reign forever and ever' (Rv 11:15). Jesus' authority defeated and cast out the enemy (Rv 12:10-12), enabling him to reign supremely (Rv 19:11-21). This assertion is endorsed by the multiple references to Jesus as the Lamb who shares the throne of God (Rv 5:6, 13; 7:9-10, 17; 22:1, 3). When John introduces the slaughtered Lamb in Revelation 5:9-10, the four living creatures and 24 elders commence to sing about the Lamb. He is standing in the centre of the throne with God and is worshipped simultaneously with the One seated on the throne (Hardin 2014, p. 238). In Revelation 15:3-5, the Lamb is also worshipped for his conquering of the beast and his provision of ultimate victory over the world (Beale 1999, p. 790). All this, in effect, communicates that one of the major emphases in the prayers is that 'only God and Christ should be worshipped, not the emperor or angels (Rv 19:10; 22:8-9)' (Osborne 2002, p. 46).

Although the Spirit does not appear to be so prominent in the prayer matrix as God and Jesus, the Spirit is certainly operative in the background to foster the worship. This can be deduced and is emphasised in the closures of the seven letters in Chapters 2-3: 'ὁ ἔχων οὐκ ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις'.<sup>259</sup> In addition, as the Lamb, Jesus is the exclusive axis for redemption for those who are faithful. Also, in his suffering, he constitutes the only paradigm after which believers should pattern themselves (Rv 6:9-11; 14:4-5; Stuckenbruck 2019, p. 12).<sup>260</sup> Worship,

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258. The Lamb that was slaughtered and who lives, expresses distinctly the essence of the Christian community. When the Lamb becomes the focus of prayer it labels the identity of the Christian community (Koester 2015, p. 2).

259. See the publication of Kuykendall (2021, pp. 527-544), on *An expanded role for the Spirit in the Book of Revelation*.

260. Also, Blackwell et al. (2019).

throughout Revelation, results in joy as well as judgement (Osborne 2010, p. 266).

## ■ Divine attributes and works

Worship in Heaven is founded on the disclosed truth about God and his son – on their attributes and works (MacLeod 2007, p. 470). John designates God to be eternal, the one ‘who lives forever and ever’ (Rv 4:9, 11; 7:12) (Rv 4:8; 11:17; cf. Rv 16:5). God is sovereign over history (Rv 4:8d), God controls the *past* (‘who was’), *present* (‘who is’), and *future* (‘who is to come’); and God is both the creator and sustainer of ‘all things’ (Rv 4:11b; Osborne 2002, p. 47). Five times God has been referred to as ‘the Almighty’ [ὁ παντοκράτωρ] (Rv 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; also cf. Rv 16:14; 19:15; 20:21). God is the great King over ‘many peoples and nations and languages and kings’ (Rv 10:11). The same is declared about the Lamb (Rv 5:13; 11:15).

In Revelation 5:9, God is worshipped for God’s works of both redemption and judgement (cf. Rv 11:17–18).<sup>261</sup> In Revelation 15:3–4 and 16:5–7, references occur to the holiness and righteousness of God as causative factors for God’s judgement (wrath and destruction) of (1) the human enemies of Christ, (2) the evil trinity (beast, dragon and false prophet) and (3) the scorched Babylon<sup>262</sup> (Hardin 2014, p. 242). Both God’s justice and love are mutually dependent aspects of God’s being.

## ■ Divine judgement

One of the objectives in Revelation is to alert vulnerable Christians that only God is worthy to be worshipped (Peterson 1992, pp. 262–265). This is evident from the four Hallelujah prayer-choruses of Revelation 19:1–10. God is worshipped here for both ‘destroying the evildoers and rewarding the righteous’ (Osborne 2010, p. 265).

John expresses the reaction of God to unrighteousness through visions to ensure the readers that unrighteousness will not prevail indefinitely. Revelation is not about the judgement of Christians! It is primarily how God tries to persuade the world to follow him, and then how God destroys those who do not, who will not (Shipp 1988, pp. 63–64), and the evildoers (Rv 19:1–8). Also, the conflict described in Revelation never denotes any conflict between peoples of various nationalities or races. It rather signifies

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261. In summary, God is praised for destroying and rewarding; also, for both God’s love and justice which are mutually dependent aspects of God’s being.

262. See Chapter 16, the pouring of the bowls by the angels.



the conflict between those who worship God and those who worship the beast (Rv 14:9-11; Hardin 2014, pp. 243-244).

The declaration of the righteousness and holiness of God (Rv 16:5) is founded on God's judgement of persecutors (Beale 1999, p. 818). The mentioning of the 'altar' together with the 'judgements' of God being 'true and righteous' are complemented further by the two references already observed in Revelation 16:5b, 'You are just, O Holy One, who are and were, for you have judged these things'. Even the following two references also verify this statement: 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge' (Rv 6:10) and 'true and righteous are your judgments' (Rv 16:7; Beale 1999, p. 820).

John refers in Revelation 19:1-5 to the worshipping of God for the justice of the judgements of God. A heavenly multitude (Rv 19:1-2)<sup>263</sup> praises God for judging the great whore (ch. 17; Osborne 2002, p. 49). In the Hallelujah prayer-choruses (Rv 19:1-8), God is praised for both rewarding the righteous and destroying the evildoers. Both these aspects of worship are evident in these prayer-choruses (Osborne 2010, p. 264). The *first Hallelujah* praise in Revelation 19:1 for worshipping God is that 'his judgments are true and just' (Rv 19:2; also cf. Rv 14:8; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; Yeatts 2003, p. 351). The *second Hallelujah* praise in Revelation 19:3 refers to the righteous judgement of God that must endure forever (Easley 1998, p. 347).

## ■ Present and future hope

The letters about the seven churches (chs. 2-3) are followed by John's vision of a ceremonial liturgy performed in Heaven (Rv 4:1-5:15), culminating in his proclamation of the victory of God: 'the appearance of a Lamb, already victorious - slain yet standing (Rv 5:6)' (Moloney 2019, pp. 3-4). The prayers in Revelation are saturated with assertions about God's victory 'from all time in and through the slain and risen Lamb' (see Rv 5:6, 9-14; 11:15-19; 19:1-8; cf. also Rv 7:12-8:1; 16:17-21; 18:20-24; 20:11-15; 21:1-22:5; Moloney 2019, pp. 5-6). This victory of the Lamb is already described prior to the explanation of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. It is repeatedly referred to after each seven comes to closure (cf. Moloney 2019, pp. 3-4). John also repetitively refers to the victory already attained by 'the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world' (Rv 13:8). For John, the victory has been accomplished with the exaltation of the Messiah.

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263. Although the 'great multitude' here may refer to be an angelic multitude (Rv 5:11-12; 7:11-12; 12:10; see also Heb 12:22), the reference to salvation and the blood of the servants of God makes it more likely that they refer to the faithful in heaven 'who have come out of the great tribulation' (Rv 7:9-10; 13:17; 15:2-5) (Yeatts 2003, p. 351).

Even the saints of Israel participated in the death and resurrection of Jesus as the consequence of being obedient to the Law as well as their faith in the prophetic Messianic promises. They already experience this glory (see Rv 6:9-11; cf. also Rv 7:1-8; 14:1; 15:1; 20:1-6). Through this message, John addresses the early (also today) Christians who faced the challenges of living a life of following Jesus. During this time, God was no longer accessed through the temple in Jerusalem, 'for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple' (Rv 21:22). Therefore, during this time, the exclamation of Christians was, 'Come, Lord Jesus!' (Rv 22:20). These prayers encourage them, give them hope and surety. These Christians lived their lives in anticipating a final coming (Moloney 2019, p. 13).

Unfortunately, too many Christian believers think that Jesus' victory will still occur in the future. Fortunately, the victory of Jesus already occurred at the cross! Jesus' heavenly ascension caused him to earn the rightful place as the sovereign ruler of all creation. Although evil still exists in the world, it does not denote that Jesus is not reigning. Irrespective of what happens in this outrageous world, Christian believers must never ignore the fact that 'Jesus is Lord and he reigns over all, even evil'. The 'Prayers from the book of Revelation' from the saints in Heaven, imply Jesus reigns now. John describes their prayers as now-events before the throne. His apocalyptic arrival at the end of time is merely to manifest in the new Heaven and the new Earth, that Jesus already reigns now. God is involved in God's creation, every day. Therefore, trust and hope in God should be attained in the prayers of believers and not in anything else or anybody. Also, when Christians live in the expectation of a final coming, they should stand firm, having solid reasons for hope in dark times (Moloney 2019, p. 13).

## ■ Conclusion

Three modes of prayer have been pointed out to form a trilogy of prayer. The three explicit references to *prayer* [προσευχή], the *hymns* [ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν] and *worship* [προσκυνέω] directed to God and the Lamb complement one another. The content of these prayers, with the ritual contexts in which they are located shape the way the church (readers) should view themselves in the presence of God and fellow believers (Koester 2015, p. 1). The text of Revelation becomes particularly effective in the abundant use of images so that the prayers should not only be depicted on a cognitive level but also be reinforced on the *emotional*, *imaginative* and *experiential* levels (cf. Koester 2014, pp. 134-136) via the Spirit.

It is obvious that the prayers were words of encouragement and warning to the first readers as they faced various kinds of opposition. If prayers are

offered to God and Christ *in everyday life*, as Christians who sustain their faith in God and resist temptations, their devotion should ‘focus on the sovereignty of God and the victory of the Lamb’ (Peterson 1988, p. 73). Prayer in Revelation reminds us that we worship not merely as individuals, or as a congregation or a church, but as part of the people of God throughout human history (cf. Thompson 1990, p. 53). Approaching God or the risen Christ vividly in worshipping prayer or continuously consigning prospects of eschatological completion will motivate and encourage the readers, also today, to stay steadfast in their faith despite their current troubling situations.

Visions of the new creation in our prayers and everyday living are essential; we cannot live without them, for they bring healing to our lives and to our troubled world. Faith indicates that if Christ is our companion and the Spirit works within, then God is dwelling within us. If this perspective holds true, then ‘Heaven’ can already in some form be experienced here, evil is ‘defeated’, the world becomes renewed and all creatures are beloved, for reality is already undergoing cosmic transformation. This vision of promise and faith keeps ‘making all things new’. In the Bible, when all is said and done, we can believe that a new Heaven and a new Earth – joined together completely now and forever (cf. Eph 1:10) at the παρουσία – is awaiting believers. Those who follow the Lamb already belong to the new Heaven and new Earth. Surely this is hope revealed (cf. Vande Kappelle 2013, p. 160)!

# A Biblical Theology of prayer: A synopsis of prayer in Scripture

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## ■ Introduction

The previous chapters of this publication have investigated prayer and various elements related to it – including worship, praise, thanksgiving, adoration, petition, intercession, lament and confession – in both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) – on a book-by-book or corpus-by-corpus basis. These various explorations and findings indicate that prayer is a major concept in Scripture.

*A Biblical Theology of prayer* such as this will not be complete without providing a ‘big picture’ view or ‘canonical synthesis’ of prayer in Scripture. The aim of this concluding chapter is to trace the development of the

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concept of prayer through the OT and NT by synthesising the discussions of previous chapters. It attempts to uncover the overarching theology of prayer in the Bible by understanding the parts in relation to the whole and providing Biblical Theological perspectives.

This chapter starts by discussing the concept of prayer in the OT by providing a broad overview of the occurrence of the concept in the OT, considering the literary function of the concept in certain corpora of the OT, examining different types of prayers in the OT, presenting a synthesis of the basic characteristics of prayer in the OT and tracing possible developments of the concept in the OT. Next, the chapter discusses the concept of prayer in the NT by providing a broad overview of the occurrence of the concept in the NT, followed by an overview of the basic characteristics of prayer in the NT. With the discussion of the concept of prayer in the OT and NT 'as departure point, the chapter then gives an overview of the concept of [prayer] in the whole of Scripture, among others by indicating lines of development of the concept' (Coetsee & Viljoen 2021, p. 204). 'The chapter ends by reflecting on the implications of these findings for [...] the practice of Reformed Theology in Africa [...]' (Coetsee & Viljoen 2021, p. 204).

## ■ The concept of prayer in the Old Testament

### ■ A broad overview of the occurrence of the concept of prayer in the Old Testament

In the Pentateuch, the specific Hebrew root used to refer to prayer is פָּלַל. Occurrences of this root in the Pentateuch, however, are relatively infrequent (8x: Gn 20:7, 17; 48:11; Nm 11:2; 21:7; Dt 9:20, 26). Verbs of speech – like 'say', 'spoke', 'call', 'cry' and 'beseech' – are much more common to denote prayer in the first five books of the OT (Haynes 2023).

There are relatively few prayers found in Joshua–Judges. In Samuel–Kings, however, a substantial number of prayers are recorded, and their content are reported (see Firth 2023).

The Major Prophets – especially Isaiah and Jeremiah – contain several prayers (see Dekker 2023). Striking references to prayers in Isaiah include the recurring accusation against the people that they do not consult the Holy One of Israel (Is 9:12; 22:11; 31:1), and that their prayers are futile because of sin or formalism (Is 29:13), YHWH's own announcement that his temple will be a house of prayer (Is 56:7), and the promise that YHWH will answer his people even before they pray to him (Is 65:24). The book of Jeremiah contains numerous prayers in which Jeremiah himself addresses God, especially in intercessory prayers.

Rochester (2023) provides an overview of the distribution of prayers and prayer forms in the Minor Prophets. According to her, three of these books have no recorded or implied prayers, namely Obadiah, Nahum and Haggai. Prayer is foundational for the book of Habakkuk, which can be viewed in its entirety as ‘a human–divine conversation that is prayer’ (Rochester 2023, p. 78).

Snyman (2023) aptly states that:

[7]he Psalms as the introduction to the third part of the Hebrew Bible, record the people’s response to the words and deeds of YHWH as recorded in the first and second parts of the TeNaK. (p. 91)

As a result, virtually all the Psalms have elements of prayers.<sup>264</sup>

Various parts of the discourses of Job and his friends can be interpreted as prayer. Ho (2023, p. 129) indicates that a ‘growing number of scholars have recognised that religious language is a central theme in the book of Job’. These ‘prayers’ contain various elements of prayers found in the Psalms and the rest of the OT.

The five poems of the book of Lamentations have a lot in common with other laments from the Ancient Near East (ANE) and Mediterranean. While prayer is not the primary characteristic of the poems of Lamentations, there are several prayer-related matters that can and should be noted (see Kotzé [2023] for the discussion). To name but one unique example, Kotzé indicates how multiple voices are heard in the prayer-passages of Lamentations 1; several characters turn to YHWH in prayer and voice different concerns.

There are various references to Daniel’s prayer life and prayer in general in the book of Daniel (for a summary of these references, see Nel [2023]). Prayer is a prominent cultic theme in the book.

Floor (2023, p. 179) highlights ‘the sheer quantity of prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah’. In addition to a number of shorter prayers in these books (which are petitions for help, protection and vindication and reflect short-term needs), Ezra 9 contains a long prayer of confession and penitence (similar to Dn 9), while Nehemiah 1:5–11 and 9:5b–37 are both long prayers. The latter, which is often referred to as the ‘Nehemiah Memorial’, is one of the longest prayers in Scripture. This prayer ‘is a mixture of confession and communal lament’, acknowledging ‘that God is justified in his judgment on the worshipper’ (Floor 2023, p. 182).

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264. For an overview of the vocabulary of praise in the Psalter, especially the use of the verb הלל, see Snyman (2023); for a discussion of psalms of petition, intercession and lament, see Moretsi (2023); for an overview of the words used to refer to ‘sin’ or ‘confession’ of sin in the penitential psalms, see Van Rooy (2023).

Prayer is also a major topic in Chronicles. Jonker (2023), who indicates that scholars have different counts based on the distinction between ‘recorded’ and ‘reported’ prayers, identifies 30 prayers in Chronicles: twelve recorded prayers, sixteen reported prayers and two recorded prayers taken over from the Psalter. Of these, nineteen belong to the Chronicler’s *Sondergut*. For an overview of these prayers (including their agents, category, genre, number of verses, narrated world and narrative world), see Jonker’s (2023) informative tables.

From this overview, it is clear that references to prayer are found throughout the OT.

## ■ **The literary function of the concept of prayer in certain corpora of the Old Testament**

### □ **Prayers shape and evaluate the world in Samuel-Kings**

Firth (2023) indicates that three primary prayers in Samuel-Kings establish the context for events that follow, and that the words of these prayers shape and evaluate their world.

Hannah’s prayer (1 Sm 2:1-10), a text which is narratively and theologically significant in the book, establishes key themes for the book of Samuel as a whole and for evaluating important events within it. Her prayer functions as ‘a key lens through which we read Samuel’ (Firth 2023, p. 29). Hannah’s prayer especially provides a prophetic perspective on kingship and provides a mechanism for evaluating the monarchy.

David’s prayer in response to the dynastic promise (2 Sm 7:18-29) establishes key themes for evaluating the monarchy across all of Samuel-Kings, specifically the Davidic dynasty (Firth 2023). The prayer emphasises that the king should remain subservient to the Lord rather than acting as an independent figure; this motif, based on the example of David’s conduct, becomes the means for assessing Judah’s kings.

Solomon’s prayer (1 Ki 8:22-53) establishes key themes for the book of Kings and for evaluating important events within it. Of special importance is the prayer’s emphasis on forgiveness and its concern for the nations beyond Israel (Firth 2023).

### □ **Prayers instruct the audience of the Former Prophets, Lamentations and Chronicles**

One of the literary and theological functions of Hannah’s prayer (1 Sm 2:1-10) is to call the audience to learn from Hanna’s experience who the Lord is and what he does, especially how he weighs human actions and reverses

fortunes by acting for the weak against the powerful. The audience is invited to see how the Lord 'has changed her world in response to her earlier prayer', and they are encouraged 'to see a similar function in prayer' (Firth 2023, p. 30).

At least two of the prayers in Lamentations are meant to instruct the audience. In Lamentations 3:40–41, the speaker encourages people to pray to God with raised hands, inviting them – and, per implication, later generations – in examining their ways. Kotzé (2023, p. 149) argues that Lamentations 5, the only chapter of the book that as a whole is addressed to God, was meant 'for the ears of the audiences for whom the poem was transmitted in writing'. This communal lament instructs later generations about grief and about prayer amid grief.

David's prayer of praise based on the freewill offerings of the people for the building of the temple (1 Chr 29:10b–20) not only encourages the assembly during the liturgical ceremony to praise God's greatness, power, glory, majesty and honour, but also to do so in the future (Jonker 2023).

## □ Prayers function as rhetorical and theological instruments in Chronicles

Jonker (2023, p. 196) indicates that the prayers in Chronicles should 'not merely be considered as utterances of piety and spirituality, but rather as rhetorically and theologically powerful literary instruments that functioned in very specific socio-historical circumstances'. He argues that the prayers in Chronicles 'contributed to the theo-political discourses during the late Persian/early Hellenistic period in the province Yehud' (Jonker 2023, p. 212). One of his conclusions is that 'the Chronicler associated prayer with those kings and priests who play a central role in the book's rhetorical structure' (Jonker 2023, p. 198). Focusing on specific prayers in Chronicles, he indicates that David's prayer of praise based on the freewill offerings of the people for the building of the temple (1 Chr 29:10b–20) 'had the function of reminding all the inhabitants of the Persian province Yehud of the generosity that they are supposed to have towards the temple' (Jonker 2023, p. 203) and encouraging them to praise the Lord and to remain faithful to his commandments.

Jehoshaphat's prayer for deliverance (2 Chr 20:6–12) is preceded by the indication that Judah assembled to 'seek' the Lord. Jonker (2023) indicates that 'seeking' the Lord plays an important role in Chronicles:

Those kings who sought [...] YHWH, enjoyed rest, health and prosperity [...] while those who did not seek or rely (שָׁעַן) on YHWH, lost their battles, their prosperity, or even their health. (p. 204)



The prayer functions as a strong admonition for the people of Yehud to 'seek' the Lord in their distress, and a reminder that the Lord their God is reliable (Jonker 2023).

Hezekiah's prayer of penitence (2 Chr 30:18b-19) probably functioned 'as supplication on behalf of the Yahwistic community within a context where non-conventional forms of cultic activity were prevalent' (Jonker 2023, p. 207).

## ■ Types of prayers in the Old Testament

### □ Worship or praise

Worshipping or praising God – which can be viewed as a form of prayer – is a major topic in the Psalms. Even though there are more psalms of lament than psalms of praise, the name of the book of Psalms is תהלים, namely, 'praises' (Snyman 2023). This reflects the important place worship takes within the book. Each of the five 'books' of the psalms concludes with a doxology of praise, and the last five psalms culminate in a call to praise.

In the Psalms, God is worshipped for his attributes (especially his power, love, faithfulness, righteousness, justice, compassion and mercy) and mighty acts of creation and redemption (Snyman 2023). 'To praise God means to devote oneself to YHWH alone and this exclusive devotion to God means a renunciation of other gods' (Snyman 2023, p. 92).

While individuals have a place in the Psalms, praise is usually brought to God by a group of believers. The Hebrew verb הללו [praise] is in the plural imperative form, assuming a gathered group of people (Snyman 2023). Praising God is primarily a communal activity, performed especially at the sanctuary.

In Snyman's (2023) view, praise is the most elementary token of life that exists. To live is to praise God, and to praise God is to live.

### □ Lament

Moretsi (2023) argues that there are 42 psalms of lament within the book of Psalms, of which 30 are individual laments and twelve are communal laments. In prayers of lament in the Psalter, the psalmist often portrays himself as someone deserted or forsaken by God, with God not answering his cries or pleas (Moretsi 2023). Within these prayers, the psalmist pleads to be delivered from distress or suffering by God. 'The aim of a lament prayer is [...] to persuade God to come to the rescue of his people in distress and act on their side' (Moretsi 2023, p. 109).

Snyman (2023) indicates that a characteristic trait found in many psalms is that the psalm commences with a lament but ends in praise and worship (cf. Ps 13). Virtually all laments are underway from supplication to praise. Moretsi (2023, p. 110) concludes the same, indicating that ‘movement from despair to praise is possible, for distress does not last forever’.

## □ Petition

A prayer of petition aims to obtain something from YHWH. ‘To achieve this goal, the petitioner strives to move the heart of God with every little thing he utters’ (Moretsi 2023, p. 102). Two striking prayers of petition are:

- David’s petition in 1 Chronicles 28:18–19 (embedded within his public prayer of thanksgiving in 1 Chr 29:10b–20) that God will keep the desire in the hearts of the people to be generous toward an enterprise like building the temple, to keep their hearts loyal to God and for Solomon to keep the Lord’s commandments, decrees and statutes (cf. Jonker 2023).
- Jehoshaphat’s prayer for deliverance (2 Chr 20:6–12), which ends with a remarkable reference to the people’s dependence on the Lord: ‘For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, *but our eyes are on you*’ (2 Chr 20:12; NRSV; [*author’s added emphasis*]).

## □ Trust

Closely related to prayers of petition, various prayers in the OT express the one praying’s conviction that God will provide an outcome or come to his or her aid. Often this trust is based on God’s deeds of deliverance in the past, which enables the one praying to trust him for future acts of deliverance (cf. Snyman 2023). Psalms of praise are often combined with the call to remember the mighty deeds of God, guiding the singer to convert the ‘then’ of the psalm to the ‘now’ of his or her current situation (Snyman 2023).

## □ Penitence

In the early Western Church, seven psalms were identified as psalms of penitence, namely Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143. Van Rooy (2023, p. 118) indicates that ‘the most important element distinguishing penitentiary psalms from laments in general is the awareness and confession of sin’, and the petition for forgiveness. His own view is that Psalms 32, 38 and 51 are truly penitential psalms, while Psalms 6, 102, 130 and 143 are individual laments.

According to Van Rooy (2023, p. 127), the enduring message of the penitentiary psalms is that '[c]hurches and individuals must be able to look critically at their own history, recognise where they went wrong and ask for forgiveness'.

Outside the Psalms, especially the longer prayers of Daniel (Dn 9; cf. Nel 2023]) and Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezr 9:6-15; Neh 9:5b-37; cf. Floor 2023]), the focus is on confession of national sin and an expression of guilt and shame.

## □ Intercession

In general, intercession is an act of love focusing attention not on the needs of the one praying but the concerns of others. 'Intercessory prayer can be classified as selfless prayer, or even as self-giving prayer' (Moretsi 2023, p. 106).

Intercessory prayers are found especially in the Psalms (cf. Ps 25; 122), the Pentateuch, and the Major Prophets. The three primary intercessory prayers in the Pentateuch (Ex 32:11-14 & 33:14-16; Nm 14:13-20; Dt 3:23-25) are grounded in the covenant, focused on God's purpose to bring blessing to the nations (Gn 12:3) and based on the Lord's self-revelation of his character and promises (Haynes 2023). The prophets appear to have been given a special responsibility in making intercession within the covenantal relationship (Dekker 2023).

## □ Judgement

Some prayers in the OT ask God to judge the wicked (cf. Ps 10). While these prayers may sound strange to the modern ear, they are expressions of hope in God's justice (Moretsi 2023). Jeremiah's plea that God should retaliate against his persecutors and provide him with justice, for example, 'do not arise from personal vindictiveness but from a deep desire for justice where no justice is experienced' (Dekker 2023, p. 61).

## ■ Basic characteristics of prayer in the Old Testament

### □ Prayer is directed towards God

Prayer in the OT is directed towards God – or put differently, it should be. The first and second commandment of the decalogue prohibits having and bowing down to other gods (Ex 20:3-6; Dt 5:7-10), which would include having 'relational conversations' with them (Haynes 2023). That prayer can be directed toward other gods is indicated by the prayers of the priests of

Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Ki 18:26–29). Israel's prayers, however, were to be directed to the Lord their God alone.

In the book of Daniel, the main character prays in the direction of Jerusalem (Dn 6:10; 9:16), which Nel (2023) interprets as Daniel directing his prayers towards Heaven, where he knew God was residing. In Chronicles 'God' or 'the Lord' is the exclusive addressee of all recorded and reported prayers (Jonker 2023).

### □ **Prayer – at its most basic level – is conversation**

Throughout the Pentateuch, prayer is depicted as a verbal conversation with God (Haynes 2023). Verbs of speech are frequently employed to refer to prayer. This is the case prior to and after the Fall. The same is true from Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1–10: it is human speech addressed to God (Firth 2023). In his chapter on prayer in the Major Prophets, Dekker (2023) indicates that prayer should not be defined too narrowly. He seems to view it as any communication with God. While Rochester (2023) states that it is difficult to define the exact limits of what constitutes prayer, especially in the prophetic writings, her summary places emphasis on prayer as communication with God. Kotzé's (2023, p. 147) definition of prayer as 'intentional verbal and non-verbal communication with deities' once more lets the emphasis fall on prayer as communication, and per implication, conversation.

From this, it becomes clear that an essential feature of prayer is communication (Haynes 2023) and that prayer – at its most basic level – is conversation.

### □ **Prayer nurtures and deepens the relationship between God and his people**

Haynes (2023) indicates that:

[T]he conversations between God and humanity are not simply communicative acts offered solely for the exchange of information. They are also meant to foster the relationship between God and his people.(p. 10)

Both Abraham's (Gn 17) and Moses' (Ex 3) relationship with the Lord is strengthened and transformed as they communicate with God in prayer. By praying his intercessory prayers in the Pentateuch, Moses 'comes to more fully understand the Lord, his character, and his plans and purposes for the world' (Haynes 2023, p. 11). Moses grows in his confidence to approach the Lord in prayer, and his relationship with the Lord is deepened through prayer (Nm 14:13–20).

The third chapter of Habakkuk, especially his vow at the end that he chooses to be joyful in God his Saviour, no matter what difficulties lie ahead

(Hab 3:17–18), indicates that Habakkuk has undergone a ‘significant, even profound, transformation’ (Rochester 2023, p. 84). ‘Habakkuk has moved from lament to trust and hope, through his prayers and the responses given by the Lord’ (Rochester 2023, p. 84). Habakkuk’s prayer brought about a personal transformation.

## □ Prayer is grounded in the covenant and God’s character

The covenant God made with his people is the departure or focal point for the majority of prayers in the OT. In the Pentateuch, prayer between God and his people is grounded in the covenant and revolves around elements associated with the covenant (cf. Gn 15; Ex 2:24; Haynes 2023). David’s prayer in response to the dynastic promise (2 Sm 7:18–29) also refers to and is grounded in the covenant God made with him (cf. Firth 2023). Many of the prayers in the Major Prophets address God by his covenant name, YHWH, or as ‘our God’, presupposing a covenantal relationship (Dekker 2023). Snyman (2023, p. 91) indicates that prayer as praise ‘presupposes a relationship with the God celebrated in praise’ and that this relationship is best captured in the concept of the covenant. The six ‘remember me’ prayers in Nehemiah are calls to covenant remembrance specifically (Floor 2023). The fact that all the prayers in Chronicles are addressed to God indicates that ‘the faith community during the restoration period found the basis of their existence in YHWH, the covenant God’ (Jonker 2023, pp. 212–213).

Linking on to this, the grounds of various prayers in the OT is God’s character. Moses’ intercessory prayers in Numbers 14:13–20 and Deuteronomy 3:23–25 are based on the Lord’s self-revelation of his character and promises (Haynes 2023). The ‘[e]xtended addresses’ in the Major Prophets ‘function as theological arguments intended to make YHWH willing to answer’, as he has a reputation to uphold (Dekker 2023, p. 59). The prayers in Daniel proclaim ‘the greatness of the power of God and God’s love and care for Israel, contrasted with the nation’s rebellious disobedience to God’s “truth”’ (Nel 2023, p. 165) and emphasise God’s sovereignty and rule over the earth, especially in contrast to non-Jewish kings who view themselves as sovereign (Nel 2023; cf. Dn 2:20–22). Nehemiah’s Memorial contains a reference to the Credo, a list of God’s attributes frequently found together in the OT (Neh 9:17; cf. Ex 34:6; Nm 14:18; Ps 103: 145:8; Nah 1:3; Jnh 4:2). The most common references to God’s character in order to incite him to answering specific prayers are references to his power as Creator, his deliverance with the exodus (especially a reference to his ‘arm’) and his responsibility as supreme Judge (cf. Dekker 2023).

## □ Prayer calls for God's intervention and forgiveness

From the immediate context or the words of the prayer themselves it becomes clear that, in many cases, the one praying is in great need, requesting God's intervention. For example, many of the poets of various psalms pray for God's help (e.g. Ps 69, 86); the sailors in Jonah 1 prayed for deliverance (Jnh 1:14); Jonah himself (eventually, when his distress becomes too great) prays to be saved from the belly of the great fish (Jnh 2:1-9); Ezra prayed for a safe journey for him and his fellow travellers (Ezr 8:21-23); the speakers in Lamentations 5:19-22 cry out to the Lord to restore them. Foundational to this cry for intervention is the prayer's conviction of the Lord's sovereignty.

Closely related to a prayer for God's intervention is the prayer for God to change his mind. Dekker (2023, p. 54) states that prayer, in Scripture, is viewed 'as a legitimate attempt within the context of covenant to change God's mind'. Once more, the covenant is stressed; and once more, the prayer motif is that nothing is impossible for YHWH.

A prayer to request God to change his mind is frequently linked to a prayer for forgiveness, which is another common request in the OT.

The intensity of prayers for God's intervention and forgiveness is sometimes accompanied by a matching posture. A number of intense praying postures and actions, for example, are recorded in Ezra (Floor 2023): with torn garments and the hair of his head and beard pulled out, he prays kneeling down with hands lifted up (Ezr 9:3-5); he prays weeping, throwing himself down (Ezr 10:1); and some of these prayers were accompanied by fasting (Ezr 8:23; 9:5; 10:6).

## □ Prayer may be bold

From the perspective that, through prayer, moral and finite human beings are addressing the sovereign and only God, it is striking to read of the boldness with which certain individuals prayed in the OT.

In some of their prayers, the Major Prophets have the audacity to address complex theological questions regarding God's righteousness and faithfulness. 'They protest that YHWH does not act in accordance with his character, reputation and promises' (Dekker 2023, p. 61). They dare to hold YHWH co-responsible for Israel's sinfulness. In his intercessory prayers for Israel, Jeremiah was bold enough to continue with his intercession, despite the Lord being persistent in his rejection of his prayers (Dekker 2023).

Turning to the Minor Prophets, the book of Jonah is an example of 'a dynamic, passionate, controversial exchange between human and divine speakers' (Rochester 2023, p. 70). Habakkuk 'pours out his honest confusion

and impassioned questions regarding' the 'terrible and incomprehensible news' about the Lord's rousing of the Chaldeans (Hab 1:12-17) and expresses his puzzlement; he wants clear answers (Rochester 2023, p. 80).

In the book of Job, the main character with the same name asks 'disturbing religious questions' and accuses God of not paying attention to the prayer of the afflicted (Ho 2023, p. 138). His 'poignant words indeed defy all the conventions of traditional religious language' (Ho 2023, p. 134). The book's conflicting judgements on prayer are, of course, because of the nature of the book itself, addressing difficult theological concepts like theodicy and the retribution principle, often by means of a legal proceeding, but this does not take anything away from the boldness of Job's words.

From this, it can be deduced that the OT allows for boldness in prayer. The 'best way to deal with complex theological questions', according to Dekker (2023, p. 61), seems to be 'in frank prayer'. This type of prayer provides 'the covenant-given opportunity to appeal to God for his character, reputation and promises' (Dekker 2023, p. 62). These prayers in Scripture 'underlines the freedom that apparently exists in communication with God' (Dekker 2023, p. 61).

### **□ Prayer may be answered by a divine 'yes'**

In the OT, prayer is often heard; it is answered by a divine 'yes'. The Minor Prophets, for example, attest to the fact that '[c]rying out to God in any time of trouble is heard' (Rochester 2023, p. 85), and in Lamentations 3: 55-57, '[w]hen the helpless and godforsaken speaker hit rock bottom, he prayed for help from above' and the Lord promptly saved him (Kotzé, vol. 1; Chapter 9). The driving force behind the conviction that the Lord will favourably answer prayer is his faithfulness and compassion, and remembrances of his deliverance in the past (Nel 2023, p. 153).

A positive answer to prayers for God to change his mind should not be understood in human terms. The Lord 'relenting' of his planned conduct based on the intercessory prayers of Moses (Ex 32:11-14 and 33:14-16; Nm 14:13-20), for example, is anthropomorphic speech by which the Lord displays his mercy and loving kindness to his people (Haynes 2023).

### **□ Prayer may be answered by a divine 'no'**

Notwithstanding a divine 'yes' to most prayers in the OT, a number of OT prayers are followed by a divine 'no'.

Sometimes the reason for the negative answer is clear. The Minor Prophets, for example, indicate that answers to prayer depend on living

with integrity before God (Mi 3:4–8); prayer should be acceptable and accompanied by corresponding behaviour (Zph 2:3). In Rochester's (2023) words:

[S]ome people will cry out to the Lord and find that he will not answer them because of their evil deeds or rebellion. Those who habitually pray to idols cannot assume access to the Lord but need to be silent before him. (p. 85)

The more difficult cases in the OT are references where the reason for the divine 'no' is not stated explicitly. Moses' prayer request to see the promised land is denied (Dt 3:23–29).<sup>265</sup> Jeremiah was persistent in his intercessory prayers for Israel; YHWH, however, was persistent in his rejection of Jeremiah's prayers (Dekker 2023). In Lamentations 3:7–9, the speaker 'prayed during a time of divinely imposed distress [...] but it was to no avail because YHWH made sure that his prayers never reached the deity' (Kotzé 2023, p. 152).

This suggests that prayer in the OT could not always and necessarily expect a positive answer. In addition, despite the boldness in prayer allowed in the OT, there seems to be a limit to God's tolerance of 'candid conversations where emotions' are 'expressed freely' (Rochester 2023, p. 75). Apart from this, examples include the Lord's anger with Moses' refusal to go to Egypt to lead his people in the exodus (Ex 3–4) and the Lord's dealings with Jonah in Chapter 4.

## □ Prayer links with God's ultimate purposes

Haynes (2023) argues that prayers in the Pentateuch link with God's purposes of blessing all peoples of the earth through Abraham (Gn 12:3) by spreading his glory to the corners of the earth and gathering nations into his ever-expanding empire.

Strikingly, Solomon's prayer (1 Ki 8:22–53) contains a profound interest on the nations beyond Israel, which reaches its climax in the prayer that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord alone is God (1 Ki 8:60). The temple is viewed as 'the place where the prayers of foreigners become a witness to all peoples of Yahweh's reputation and power' (Firth 2023, p. 40).

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265. The reason might be because Moses does not accept responsibility for his sin at the waters of Meribah (Nm 20:1–13). In Deuteronomy he frequently refers to the Lord's anger towards him 'because of you' (Dt 1:37; 3:26; 4:21), namely the people of Israel, suggesting that he blames them for his predicament. Haynes (2023, p. 23) suggests that Moses' request lacks integrity of heart, and 'God, who can discern the motivations of the heart, denies the request'.



## □ **Prayer was an integral part of the religious existence of God's people**

From the aforementioned, it is clear that prayer was an integral part of the religious existence of God's people in the OT. Based on the variety of prayers found in the book, Jonker (2023) concludes that this is indeed the case in the book of Chronicles.

## ■ **Possible developments of the concept of prayer in the Old Testament**

### □ **Prayer became necessary after the Fall**

The Pentateuch lays the groundwork for what later becomes understood as prayer. Prior to and immediately after the Fall, communication between humanity and God was done verbally and face-to-face. But, 'humanity moves further away from the presence of the Lord, as seen in Cain's wandering, and face-to-face communication with the Creator is lost' (Haynes 2023, p. 23). Consequently, many scholars view Genesis 4:26 as the first reference to 'prayer' in Scripture.

### □ **Penitential prayer developed as a genre after the destruction of Jerusalem**

Dekker (2023) points out that the preaching of the Major Prophets in particular – specifically their preaching concerning the reality of God's judgement after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 BCE – caused the development of penitential prayer as a genre. This development, however, did not diminish or replace prayers of lament and complaint. Lament, complaint and penitential prayers were still used in the post-exilic period (Dekker 2023).

### □ **Prayer for national forgiveness is a result of the Exile**

The prayers recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are pervaded by an awareness and confession of sin and the realisation that the Exile was the consequence of sin (Floor 2023). It seems, therefore, that prayer for national forgiveness was a result of the Exile.

### □ **Prayer replaced the temple cult in post-exilic times**

Nel (2023) argues that the destruction of the temple in 587/586 BCE and the Antiochian crisis of the second-century BCE, which alienated faithful Jewish people from the temple, challenged Judeans to rethink their

religious cult. Their various crises gave rise to the view of collective and individual prayer as a replacement and substitute for the temple cult. The specific forms of worship confined to the temple was replaced by the more general notion of worship in prayer. The book of Daniel, so to speak, redefines the cult.

Earlier, in the Former Prophets, although not as explicit, Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Ki 8:22-53) 'allows for prayer alone to be the mechanism by which forgiveness is granted' without any reference to sacrifices (Firth 2023, p. 39).

## □ Post-exilic prayers provided the setting for the New Testament (and its prayers)

The ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah during and after the return from Exile provided a platform for a heightened renewal and restoration of the law and temple service, a new attitude toward Scripture (especially the Torah) and a new piety and religious zeal (Floor 2023). The short prayers found dispersed throughout these books point to 'a new law-abiding and Law-based "spirituality"' (Floor 2023, p. 181). In Floor's (2023, p. 176) view, the prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah 'contributed to the setting and scene of the NT', and per implication, the piety of the prayers of the NT.

## ■ The concept of prayer in the New Testament

### ■ A broad overview of the occurrence of the concept of prayer in the New Testament

For a well-rounded perspective on prayer in the NT, it is beneficial to consider the early Jewish roots from which the early Christian traditions developed. Prayer formed a central part of the Jewish service and worship of God (*Avodah*). Prayer accompanied the sacrificial cult. While cultic services took place in the temple and were run by priests and Levites, the synagogues were run by elders, where Jewish laity could participate in the temple sacrifices by praying. Mulder (2023) explores these Jewish roots and demonstrates how prayer increasingly became an independent form of worship as a kind of continuation of the sacrifices themselves.

Prayer in the ministry of Jesus is recounted in the Synoptic Gospels (see Viljoen 2023) and John's Gospel (see Anderson 2023). These Gospels depict Jesus as one who regularly communed with the Father in prayer. His prayer life went beyond Jewish practice as he did not only pray two or three times per day but even spent entire nights in prayer. Prayer formed a

critical part of his life and worship. The Synoptic Gospels render how Jesus taught his disciples to pray. In contrast to Matthew 6:5–15 and Luke 11:1–4, where the Lord's Prayer is given as a pattern for believers to follow, the Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John 17 declares the last will and testament of Jesus for his followers. Parallels can be noted between the basic outline of the Lord's Prayer and the High Priestly Prayer. In the Gospel of John, prayer forms a central element within the human–divine dialogue as a response to the divine initiative. Prayer results from an intimate relationship with the divine. Jesus encourages his disciples to pray in his name and assures them that such prayers will be answered.

The book of Acts depicts the early Christians as a worshipping community. They worshipped and prayed in the temple, synagogues and house churches. Initially they worshipped in the temple every day, in synagogues every Sabbath and then in their house churches on the 'Lord's day'. Müller van Velden (2023) demonstrates that prayer formed the foundation of the early church, was practised on multiple levels in relation to the community, was strongly informed by context, and was a force of life for the founders of the Christian movement.

The Pauline Epistles contain various references to a variety of prayers, including thanksgiving, worship, adoration, petition and intercession. Paul usually opens his epistles with formal thanksgiving, along with introductory prayers for the recipients. He thanks God for his redemptive work in Christ. In the same vein, he exhorts his addressees to thank God at all times and in all circumstances because of his grace. Thankfulness forms an essential Christian attitude, which should follow conversion and fulfilment by God's Spirit (see Du Toit 2023). In prayers of worship and adoration God is worshipped, praised, recognised and confessed based on his identity, character and actions. These prayers vary between confessions, doxologies, and eulogies (see Cornelius 2023). Petition and intercession form part of Paul's pastoral (toward the ingroup) and missionary (towards the outgroup) activity. He frequently intercedes for specific needs of both these groups, and he urges his addressees to do the same. These prayers are based on the unrepentance of God's promises of which Jesus the Messiah is the secret (see Van Houwelingen & Klinker-De Klerck 2023).

The book of Hebrews deals with the problem of the dwindling faith of the addressees. The author urges them to rekindle the flame of their faith commitment. They need a more comprehensive comprehension of the person and work of Christ, which includes knowledge of his prayers during his earthly ministry and his current prayers while exalted at God's right hand. They should be comforted by the fact that Christ is unceasingly and effectively interceding for them. He is the ultimate high priest who gave himself as the ultimate sacrifice. Having Christ as their high priest,

the addressees are encouraged to pray with boldness and reverence (see Coetsee 2023).

James addresses a series of ethical issues and how to deal with all sorts of trials. Amidst such issues, believers are encouraged to approach God in prayer with single-minded devotion. They should do so in personal and communal prayer. Prayers form a central aspect of their relationship with God. They must trust God for all their needs. James also deals with the problem of prayers seeming to remain unanswered (see Button 2023).

Though the letters of Peter and Jude do not include specific discussion on the nature of prayer, they do assume the reality and importance of prayer. There is a strong connection between prayer and ethical behaviour. 1 Peter is addressed to discouraged Christians who suffer persecution. This calls for disciplined and earnest prayer. 2 Peter and Jude warn the church against the threat of malicious false teachers. Prayers, benedictions and doxologies are means to encourage and enable believers to gain an accurate theological perspective on their difficult circumstances (see Wilson 2023).

In the Johannine epistles the author explains that petitions before God should be offered with confidence. He assures his addressees that God will hear their prayers and give them what they ask for. Confidence in prayer is linked to three concepts, namely (1) faith in the truth about Jesus, (2) the fellowship of the believers with God and (3) observance of God's commands (see Jordaan 2023).

In the book of Revelation, prayers, hymns and worship are directed to God and the Lamb. God and the Lamb are worshipped for their attributes and works. Prayers and hymns are filled with proclamations of the victory of God in and through the slain and risen Lamb. Vulnerable Christians who face serious opposition for following Jesus are assured that evildoers will be destroyed and the righteous will be rewarded. These assertions give them hope for the present and the future (see Van der Merwe 2023).

## ■ **Basic characteristics of prayer in the New Testament**

### □ **Prayer in the New Testament has Jewish roots**

With an investigation into prayer in the NT, it is important to recognise its Jewish roots in history. Prayer developed as a form of participation in sacrificial cult. While the priests were busy with their sacrificial offering, the nation would participate in praying. During the Exile and when the temple did not exist, no sacrifices could be performed, but the worship of God could continue in the form of prayer. As time went by, prayer increasingly

became an independent form of worship as a kind of continuation of sacrifices themselves (Mulder 2023; Viljoen 2023).

Luke describes how the assembled worshippers participated by way of communal prayer during the hour of incense (Lk 1:10) (cf. Viljoen2023). Several other Jewish sources likewise refer to this customary communal activity of the pious Jewish laity at the temple during the hour of sacrifice (cf. Sir 50:19; Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2. 196). The Talmud records the words of Rabbi Elazar, illustrating how prayer eventually took over the role of sacrifice: ‘Prayer is greater than sacrifices, as it is stated: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me, says the Lord [...]” (Is 1:11)’ (Ber. 32b) (cf. Mulder 2023).

### □ The primary function of prayer is to praise God

Because of its connection with sacrificial service, prayer was primarily focused on offering and not on petition. God’s praise formed the primary focus of prayer. By implication, prayer was not, in the first place, an action by the supplicant to ask something from God, but primarily to honour God. Prayer was the *avodah* [service] of the heart as an extension and expression of the *avodah* in the temple. The Mishnahic tractate of *Ta’anit* describes the practices of prayer: ‘What kind of *avodah* is that which takes place in the heart? We must answer: “It is prayer!”’ (Ta’an. 2a).

The typically Jewish blessing of God therefore defines the basic character of prayer. The essence of prayer is to offer praise to God. Even when the supplicants would ask for God’s favour and mercy, this focus remains (Mulder 2023).

### □ Prayer has a Theocentric orientation

Within a world where people were exposed to idols and images of a variety of gods, the religion of Israel has set the theocentric orientation of prayer. God is one and God alone had to be worshipped. The *Shema* (Dt 6:4) was an established element of public and eventually private worship in the intertestamental and NT times. The *Shema* was recited at least twice a day. In the temptation scene, Jesus rebukes the devil by reciting the *Shema*, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’ (Mt 4:10; Lk 4:8). Divine worship clearly focused on God, his attributes and his works, founded on the disclosed truths about him (Viljoen 2023).

### □ Three modes of prayer exist

Three modes of prayer can be recognised in the NT and related literature, namely, (1) worship and adoration, (2) thanksgiving and (3) petition.

## □ **Worship and adoration**

Worship and adoration form the central focus of prayer. It comprises communication about God with ‘declarative praise’ and ‘eulogy’. It recognises God for who he is and what he does for humankind in the form of benedictions, declarations, confirmations, confessions and reaffirmations about the character, particular attributes and actions of God (Cornelius 2023).

According to the Mishnah, benediction had to be said at the beginning and at the end of readings from Scripture. Tamid V,1 alludes to several benedictions. During the Tannaitic period the so-called ‘eighteen benedictions’ [*Amidah*] were commonly known and used as the main prayer or ‘the prayer par excellence’. The *Amidah* would begin with the praise of God for who he is, followed by petitions, and concluded by lauding God for his blessings. The basic composition of the *Amidah* can be recognised in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, beginning with three benedictions concentrating on the name and the kingdom of God, followed by supplications for communal and personal needs, and concluding with thanksgiving and praise<sup>266</sup> (Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4) (cf. Mulder 2023; Viljoen 2023).

Early Christian blessings or benedictions [εὐλογία or εὐχαριστία] were inherited from Jewish *Berachah* [blessing] (cf. Mulder 2023). Such blessings would form the highest expression of worship. By doing so, the supplicants would bestow upon God the highest attributes humans can imagine and proclaim him before the entire world. God’s splendour was acknowledged and his worthiness was adored, especially in Christ.

Blessings and benedictions were closely related to what is typically described as ‘doxology’. Doxology is a formula that ascribes glory to God and therefore always includes an ascription of ‘glory’ [δόξα]. While doxology acknowledges the splendour of God’s being, blessings emphasise thanks because of God for what he has done (Cornelius 2023).

In the Pauline Epistles, prayers of worship, praise, recognition and confession of God, based on his identity, character and actions, frequently occur. These prayers vary between confessions, doxologies, hymns of praise (including the word δόξα) and eulogies (tributes to God introduced with εὐλογητός). Prayer was a core expression of faith in the early church. Prayer and faith were inseparable, as earnest prayer required sincere faith in God (Mk 11:22). Prayer should express intimate rapport with God. It is therefore unsurprising that Jesus criticised the presumptuous and insincere piety and prayers of religious leaders of his day (Lk 20:47; Mk 12:40).

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266. Late manuscripts include the concluding praise of the Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer should not be misused for public display to seek public admiration, and the temple ought to be a 'house of prayer' where misconduct should not be tolerated (Mt 21:13) (cf. Viljoen 2023).

Doxologies in the form of hymns are frequently found in the NT, especially in Luke's Gospel (Viljoen 2023), the Pauline Epistles (Cornelius 2023) and the book of Revelation (Van der Merwe 2023). These eulogies are meant as statements (indicatives) and not as wishes (optatives). However, worship was not confined to singing or occasions of praise but implied doing everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus (Eph 5:20; Col 3:17). In thankful response to what God has done for supplicants in Christ, their prayers should always contain praise (Heb 13:15) (Coetsee 2023).

In Jewish religion, the daily benedictions were accompanied by confession of faith, both in and outside the temple. Confessions of faith became acts of adoration (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–20; 1 Tm 3:16). With these confessions one would show admiration and adoration to God for who he is and what he does.

*Avodah* and deeds of loving kindness [*chesed*] belong together. Worship as prayer can therefore not be separated from listening to the Torah and putting it into practice. Acts of loving kindness that accompanied prayers were common features of early Jewish and early Christian 'service of the heart' (Avot 1,2; cf. Mt 6:1–14) (cf. Viljoen 2023).

## □ **Thanksgiving**

Thanksgiving forms the second mode of prayer. By worship and adoration, prayer is entirely focused on God himself, while in thanksgiving the attention of prayer is drawn to the gift for which God is acknowledged. While thanksgiving can be considered as a specific mode of prayer (e.g. 1 Tm 2:1), it is also the necessary attitude that underlies all forms of prayer. Thanksgiving signifies the outward expression in word or deed of the interior sentiment of gratitude for a favour received, while the lack of thanksgiving or ungratefulness is a prime mark of an idolatrous person (Du Toit 2023).

Paul frequently uses concepts such as thanksgiving or gratefulness [εὐχαριστέω, εὐχαριστία, εὐχάριστος, χάρις], grace [χάρις], gifts [χαρίσματα], joy [χαρά] and rejoicing [χαίρω] together (e.g. 1 Cor 1:4–8; Col 1:9–14; Philp 4: 4–6). None of these concepts can exist in isolation in a believer's life. This implies that those who experience God's grace and gifts of the Spirit must express their joy in thanksgiving.

## □ **Petition**

The third mode of prayer comprises petition. With these petitions, the faith community surrenders itself for all its needs to God. The difference between petition and worship and thanksgiving is that petition *seeks* while worship and thanksgiving *give*.

James encourages his readers to trust in God for all their needs, including their physical well-being (Ja 5:14–16), their need for forgiveness (Ja 5:14–16), their need for sanctifying grace (Ja 1:5–8) or their needs of a more unspecified nature (Ja 4:2–3). God gives unreservedly and without finding fault (Ja 1:5) (cf. Button 2023).

In petition, confidence is expressed that God would hear. Prayers of petition end with a blessing that expresses the certainty that God will provide what he is asked for. The author of Hebrews explicitly exhorts his readers to pray with ‘boldness’ [παρρησία] (Heb 4:16; 10:22), that is, with confidence and certainty because of the high priestly ministry of Christ (Coetsee 2023). James urges his readers to ask in faith, with no doubting (Ja 1:6) (Button 2023). The author in 1 John similarly urges his readers that their petitions before God should be made with παρρησία (1 Jn 5:14–15) (Jordaan 2023). In his Farewell Discourse, Jesus invites his followers to ask in his name, assuring them that he will indeed answer their requests (Jn 14:13–14) (Anderson 2023). However, confidence to approach God in prayer and confidence that he will give whatever we ask does not mean unlimited freedom in prayers. 1 John 5:14 states that we may ask from God anything ‘according to his will’. Thereby it sets God’s will as a limit to what we may ask in prayer. We can pray with confidence that God will give what we ask, only in as far as we know his will (Jordaan 2023).

Even those prayers that comprise petitions should be embedded in worship and thanksgiving. Paul frequently connects thanksgiving with petition [προσευχή], supplication [δεήσεις] and intercession [ἐντεύξεις] (Phlp 4:6; Col 4:2; 1 Tm 2:1). Thanksgiving provides the perspective through which petitions can be offered.

As mentioned before, the second part of the so-called ‘eighteen benedictions’ (the *Amidah*) of the Jewish liturgy consists of petitions. This follows the part in which God is blessed. God is, *inter alia*, asked for knowledge, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, healing and blessing of years.

In prayer, one does not only practice commitment to God, but also to the community of believers and the world. The act of praying thus has a vertical dimension, namely to exalt, praise and worship God, but also a horizontal dimension, to intercede for the needs of all. The book of Acts



narrates the connection between intercession and healing (Ac 28:8) (Müller van Velden 2023). 1 Timothy 2:1 mentions intercessions that is needed for all people. For Paul, intercession covers all areas of Christian community life. He mentions intercession for spiritual growth (Rm 15:13; Eph 3:16, 19; Phlp 1:10–11; 1 Th 3:13; 5:23; 2 Th 1:11; 2:17; 3:5), the understanding of God's will and promises (Eph 1:16–19; Phlp 1:9–10; Col 1:9–10), a Christian attitude (2 Cor 13:7; Col 1:10; 2 Th 1:11; 2:17), loving harmony among the members of the congregation (Rm 15:5–6; Eph 3:17; 1 Th 3:12) and the peace of Christ (Rm 15:13; 2 Th 3:16) (Van Houwelingen & Klinker-De Klerck 2023). James instructs his readers to pray for the sick (Ja 5:13–16) (Button 2023).

Besides intercession for the community of believers, intercession should also be made for non-believers. Praying for outsiders forms an integral part of the mission of Christians. God's co-workers should pray for the harvest (Mt 9:38) (Viljoen 2023). Intercession forms part of Paul's missionary activity in Acts and in his epistles (Müller van Velden 2023). In his letter to the Romans, Paul deals extensively with his fellow Jewish people who still do not consider Jesus as the Messiah of Israel (Rm 9–11). He desires that Israel would experience salvation (2 Th 1:11) (Van Houwelingen & Klinker-De Klerck 2023).

## □ The temple should have been a House of Prayer

During the Second Temple period, the temple stood central to Jewish life and worship. During the intertestamental times, the practise of worship increasingly developed within the synagogal services. Originally, synagogues were not substitutes for the temple, as the developments of the synagogal and temple liturgy mutually influenced and enriched each other. While priests and Levites performed the cultic activities in the temple, lay elders took the lead in the synagogues. What started as a participation in the cult in the synagogues developed into a democratisation of the cult. After the destruction of the temple, the worship of God continued in synagogues. Prayer service eventually developed into an independent, fixed form of worship (Mulder 2023; Viljoen 2023).

The temple and synagogues played an important role in the life of Jesus. At the age of twelve, he amazed the rabbinic teachers in the temple (Lk 2:47), he called the temple 'my Father's house' (Lk 2:43) and he expected his parents to know that he was there. It was his custom to go to the synagogue (Lk 4:16). He started his public ministry with reading and interpreting a scroll in the synagogue (Lk 4:16–21). Yet, later in his ministry, Jesus indicated that the temple and its establishment would no longer function as the actual place of prayer (Mk 11:22–25). In the narrative of the temple cleansing (Mt 21:13; Mk 11:17; Lk 19:46), he criticises the misconduct of the religious leaders (Viljoen 2023).

In the NT, temple and synagogue practices were eventually replaced by the faithful prayers of Jesus' followers. Tensions developed between followers of Jesus and their Jewish family and friends in local synagogues. Those who confessed Jesus were cast out of the synagogues (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) (Anderson 2023). The service [*avodah*] within the temple and synagogue was continued as a service of the hearts of those praying, offering these prayers as sacrifices of their lips (Heb 13:15) (Coetsee 2023).

The third stanza of Johannine Christ-hymn states that God has tabernacled among humanity, not in the form of a building or a shrine, but in the form of a person (Jn 1:14) (Anderson 2023). God's people were to live as a spiritual temple in which prayer forms a part of the 'spiritual sacrifices' that are offered (Rm 12:1; Eph 2:22; 1 Pt 2:5).

In Acts, prayer and worship were not limited to particular times and specific settings. Though Acts refers the daily gathering of Christians for worship (Ac 2:46), there was a preference for the first day of the week (Ac 20:7) (Müller van Velden 2023). Paul writes that prayer should not be limited to fixed times but must be done unceasingly (ἀδιαλείπτως, 1 Th 1:2; 2:13). Similarly, thanksgiving is required in all circumstances.

### □ Prayer can be offered as songs

As mentioned before, prayers were often offered in the form of songs. A series of prayer songs appear in Luke's infancy narrative (Lk 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:29–32) (Viljoen 2023). Believers are called to give thanks to God the Father always and for everything as part of Christian worship and praise in song (Col 3:16 and Eph 5:19) (Du Toit 2023). A sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15) probably refers to a verbal praise confession of God's name in song and prayer (Coetsee 2023). James 5:13 refers to singing songs of praise when praying for the sick (Button 2023). The book of Revelation offers songs of praise, for example, glory and honour to God as the Creator (Rv 4:8–11), blessing, honour, glory to God and the Lamb as Saviour (Rv 5:7–14), blessing, glory, wisdom to God (Rv 7:9–12), praise to God's majesty (Rv 15:3–4), and praise to God for his true and just judgements and his almighty reign (Rv 19:1–8) (Van der Merwe, 2023).

### □ Prayer arises from an intimate relationship with the Triune God

Prayer arises from an intimate relationship with God. It forms a central function in a believer's relationship with God and of living out a life of faith. It expresses one's single-minded devotion and communication with God.

Human-divine communication runs in both directions. Prayer is the human response to God's revelation. God's saving-revealing Word that became flesh is the source of both creation and redemption. God's Word is confessed as being the light and life of all humanity, inviting a response of faith to the divine initiative (Jn 1:1-5). Humanity is called to take a stand for or against the Revealer. While the divine initiative forms the basis for humans seeking God, their seeking becomes evidence of them having been found by God (Anderson 2023). Prayer is therefore not a means of manipulating supernatural powers but a relational activity and expression of confidence in the character of God, who loves his people and draws them near to him in mercy (Button 2023).

### ☐ **God the Father**

God is intimately addressed as 'Father' [Αββά] (Rm 8:15). Contrary to what is frequently assumed, this address is not unfound in ancient Judaism. Addressing God as 'our Father' was, in fact, common in Judaism since ancient times. In Qumran literature, God is invoked in this way, sometimes even more personally as 'my Father' (4Q 372:16). This address expresses intimacy, humility, and boldness (Viljoen 2023).

### ☐ **God the Son**

The Gospels depict Jesus as the unique Son who continually approaches God in prayer as his Father. John's Gospel tells that the Father and the Son are one (Jn 10:30; 14:9; 17:11, 21; etc.). The NT epistles frequently refer to God as the Father of Jesus (2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3; 1 Pt 1:3).

Jesus is the Father's unique Son, but his followers are privileged to also know and address God as their Father (Mt 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 6, 8; Mk 11:26; Lk 11:1-13; Rm 8:15). This they can do based on their relationship with Jesus himself. He acts as their mediator. The author of Hebrews ensures his readers that Jesus is their sympathetic high priest (Heb 4:15). Jesus 'is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, as he always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb 7:25; NRSV). Hebrews 4:16 assures the addressees that they have free access to God through Christ, their great high priest. Through Christ, they may be sure that they will receive divine and timely assistance during trials. They should be comforted by the fact that Christ unceasingly and effectively intercedes for them (Heb 7:25; 9:24) (Coetsee).

While Jesus acts as a mediator for those who pray and is present with those who pray (Mt 16:18), he is included in the theocentric adoration of God and worshipped as well (Mt 28:17; Lk 24:52) (Viljoen 2023). In the book of Acts, the worship of Jesus was met with resistance. Worshipping a deity

whom one claims to be the Son of God, who was crucified and raised from the dead, a deity who cannot be contained in a statue or who does not hold the title of Caesar, was rejectable (Müller van Velden 2023).

### □ **God the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit empowers people to worship God authentically (Jn 4:23–24). Jesus assured his disciples that, after his departure, the Holy Spirit would expand and continue his work beyond the bounds of time and space, abiding in and with his followers forever (Jn 16) (Anderson 2023). The Holy Spirit would guide them in all truth. The Holy Spirit becomes the means by which any believer, at any given time, can pray to God, can call on Jesus Christ as Lord and can prayerfully act in the name of the Comforter (Van Houwelingen & Klinker-De Klerck 2023). Paul writes (Rm 8):

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (vv. 26–27; NRSV)

Believers can approach God with confidence based on their assurance that, as his children, they have fellowship with him through the Holy Spirit. The fact that God abides in them through his Spirit who lives in them, and the fact that they are born of him (1 Jh 4:13) provides confidence to approach God in prayer (Jordaan 2023).

Praying ‘in the Spirit’ entails praying with divine help. The Holy Spirit assists supplicants to resist evil powers and to pray for the right things in the right way (Jude 20) (Wilson 2023).

While the Holy Spirit instigates and guides prayer, he is also promised in answer to prayer (Viljoen 2023). Filling by the Holy Spirit both causes and results from prayer. The Spirit did not only descend as a result of Jesus’ baptism, but also in response to his prayer (Lk 3:21–22). Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer (Lk 11:9–13).

By the power of the Holy Spirit prayer becomes a creative, powerful force of life and an instrument of change in the book of Acts (Ac 1:8) (Müller van Velden 2023). It brings about change and healing on numerous levels.

### □ **Prayer is a relational activity between believers**

Prayer is a natural activity in the way believers care for and support one another. As part of their fellowship with and love for one another, believers should intercede for their fellow brothers and sisters (1 Jn 5:16) (Jordaan 2023). Paul urges his readers to pray for one another (Col 4:3–6; 1 Th 5:25) (cf. Van Houwelingen & Klinker-De Klerck 2023). Prayer forms part of formal

pastoral care but also more informal mutual care between members of the community (Ja 5:14–18) (Button 2023).

Prayer is not only an individual activity. While the book of Acts teaches that prayer is done in a congregation or a church, the book of Revelation teaches that prayer forms part of the religious experience of the people of God throughout human history.

The relational aspect of prayer is exemplified by the 'Amen' as a public affirmation of prayer and a choral response of praise.

## □ Prayer has an eschatological perspective

Prayer expresses the tension between the present and the coming age. Prayer expresses the overlap between Heaven and Earth, as it expects God's direct involvement in creation. It calls for an ideal reality which is not fully present yet (Mt 6:10). Fasting and prayer are needed during the bridegroom's absence (Lk 5:33). Prayer expresses comfort, gratitude and hope as a consequence of eschatological life in Christ (Viljoen 2023).

However, believers in this age still experience a continuous battle against evil forces (Eph 6:10–20). Therefore, they need to pray to endure temptation. They should not lose heart but must persist in praying for strength to be sustained at the unexpected arrival of times of tribulation (Lk. 21:36). In their hardship, they may cry out to God in prayer.

In all, they must remain hopeful and thankful. Even imprisonment did not stop Paul and Silas from praying and worshipping God (Ac 16). 1 Peter 1:3–9 and Jude 20–24 offer prayer, benediction and doxology as a means of encouraging and enabling their readers to gain an accurate theological perspective on their difficult circumstances (Wilson 2023). In Revelation, numerous visions of glory inspire God's people to persevere in faith. These glimpses of glory inspire them in their worship here on Earth, which foreshadows heavenly worship (Van der Merwe 2023). Believers are encouraged to continuously anticipate a scenario of the concluding victory. When Christians live in the expectation of the final coming, they have solid reasons for hope in dark times. This they express in worship and adoration, thanksgiving, and petition to the Triune God.

## ■ The concept of prayer in Scripture

With the discussion of the concept of prayer in the OT and NT above as departure point, a brief overview of the concept of prayer in Scripture as a whole can now be provided.

## ■ The development of the concept of prayer in Scripture

The various chapters of this publication make it clear that references to prayer are found throughout Scripture. Prayer was an integral part of the religious existence of God's people in both the OT and NT.

Like various other concepts in Scripture, the concept of prayer developed. First and foremost, the biblical text indicates that prayer became a necessity after the Fall. Before the Fall, God and human beings communicated with one another verbally and face-to-face. Since the Fall, however, face-to-face communication with God was lost and prayer became a necessity.

While there are various unique references to prayer dispersed throughout the OT, prayer underwent its greatest developments during, after and as a result of the Exile. The growing awareness that the Exile was the consequence of sin gave rise to the development of penitential prayer and prayers for national forgiveness as genres. The alienation of many faithful Jewish people from the first temple with its destruction challenged them to rethink their religious cult. Individual and collective prayer became its main replacement, or rather, the main continuation of the cult. As time went by prayer increasingly developed into an independent form of fixed worship. These developments laid the foundation for NT worship traditions.

In the NT, Jesus deepened and transformed prayer. Not only is he the exemplar of prayer *par excellence* in Scripture, regularly communicating with the Father in prayer as part of his life and ministry, but he instructs his disciples (and in so doing his church) about prayer and its essence. From this, it comes as no surprise that prayer formed part of the foundation of the early church. It was, as Müller van Velden (2023) puts it, a 'force of life' in the early church and a core expression of their faith.

Based on the early church's conviction about the identity and work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, prayer in the NT has Trinitarian characteristics. God is thanked for his redemptive work in Christ (e.g. 1 Cor 1:4), along with the Father Jesus is worshipped in prayer (Rv 5:9-14; 7:10-12), and the church prays through the power of the Spirit (Eph 6:18; Jude 20). The NT church could live and pray with the conviction that Jesus always lives to make intercession for them (Heb 7:25) and that the Spirit assists them by interceding for them according to the will of God (Rm 8:26-27).

The church, based on its convictions and the tension it experiences between the present and coming age, prayed for the speedy return of Christ (Rv 22:20). Per implication, at the consummation of all things with the return of Christ, the church will worship God in unison and face-to-face communication with God, lost at the Fall, will be restored.

## ■ A succinct summary of the concept of prayer in Scripture

In both the OT and the NT, God is the one prayer is directed to; he is the sole 'addressee' of his people's prayer. This stems from Israel's conviction of the Lord as the only true, living God and the Torah's strict prohibition of idolatry. This conviction continued into the NT but was broadened with Trinitarian elements of worship, adoration and intercession (cf. 1 Cor 8:4-6).

At its most basic level, prayer in Scripture is communication and conversation with God. Verbs of speech are common to denote prayer in Scripture. This conversation can be done as individuals or as a community. 'Speaking' with God in prayer throughout Scripture also suggests an intimate relationship between the pray-er and God. This is confirmed by reference to 'my' or 'our God' or 'Lord' in prayer (e.g. 1 Sam 2:1; 1 Chr 29:16) and the intimate form of address of God as 'Father' (e.g. Mt 6:9; Rm 8:15).

Prayer in Scripture is based on who God is and what he does. The conviction that God has made a covenant with his people and stays true to his self-revelation of his character and promises forms the heart of biblical prayers. In prayer, God should primarily be praised, worshipped and thanked for his attributes and acts of creation, salvation and providence; the pray-ers can confess their sin (or the sin of their people) and plead for forgiveness; they can honestly lament their circumstances, and plead in complete dependence for deliverance, help, protection or vindication; the pray-er can intercede for the needs of others; and the pray-er can pray for God's ultimate purposes.

It is important to pray with the correct biblical attitude. The one praying should not be guilty of formalistic, presumptuous and insincere prayers or an unrepentant heart. Rather, the pray-ers should recognise who they are approaching in prayer and consequently pray reverently and with matching posture. Prayer within the framework of the covenant, however, may be bold, confident and honest, trusting that God will provide an outcome and praying in Jesus' name, while knowing that the limit to what we may ask in prayer is God's will. Acknowledging God's will in prayer is one of the ways in which the pray-ers' relationship with God is strengthened and their perspective is transformed.

## ■ Conclusion

The investigation of prayer in the OT, the NT, and all of Scripture has a legion of implications for the life and ministry of the church. This concluding section only focuses on three implications for the practice of Reformed

Theology in Africa. These implications are based on the partial aim of the prayers recorded in Scripture and aspects related to praying as individuals and communities.

## ■ **The prayers in Scripture are instructive**

The prayers in Scripture teach readers throughout the centuries who God is and why he can be trusted. They indicate what the situation of the biblical pray-ers were and how they prayed from these circumstances, seeking the Lord; they encourage readers to pray similarly or to repeat the words of these prayers verbatim (e.g. the Lord's Prayer). In short, the prayers in Scripture are instructive.

The prayer life of the church would be strengthened by reading and re-reading the prayers in Scripture, studying them and emulating them.

## ■ **Praying as individuals: Prayer fosters the relationship between God and his people**

Prayer is often popularly referred to as 'the breath of the soul'. From the preceding investigation, this indeed seems to be true. Through prayer, the relationship between God and his people is fostered and the pray-er is strengthened and transformed.

If this is the case, the question is quite simple: How often do we pray? More specifically, how often do we pray in line with the contours of 'A succinct summary of the concept prayer in Scripture'? The church would do well to realise anew the importance of prayer in its life and ministry.

## ■ **Praying as a community: Praying for God's purposes and the needs of others**

Communities in the Western world are individualistic and in danger of becoming increasingly so. Prayer in Scripture, however, is a communal activity. This study found various examples of the people of God praying collectively to him. Even the prayers of individuals in Scripture are found within the overarching narrative of God's covenant with his people and his ultimate purposes. The people of God are praying for God's purposes and the needs of others.

The tragic and far-reaching consequences of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and the senseless destruction and devastation of human lives because of the war in Ukraine (2022-) urge the church of Christ to pray.



The church should pray for the needs of others living in or affected by these circumstances, interceding for them by earnestly asking God to provide an outcome. In the same breath, the church should pray for the realisation of the ultimate purposes of God, believing that God is fulfilling his great plan of salvation, that Christ is coming again, and that the new Heaven and Earth await the people of God.

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The Biblical Theology of prayer is investigated in this work according to the principles of the New Testament. It forms the second of a two-volume publication on a Biblical Theology of prayer, engaging with the concept of prayer in the Old and New Testaments, respectively. This volume opens by introducing prayer and worship in the early Jewish tradition, followed by eleven chapters dealing with New Testament corpora. It concludes with a final chapter synthesising the findings of the respective investigations of the Old and New Testaments' corpora. This provides a summative theological perspective of the development of the concept of prayer through scripture.

Prayer forms a major and continuous theme throughout the biblical text. Prayer was integral to God's people's religious existence in both the Old and New Testaments. It underwent its most significant development during, after and following the Exile and was deepened and transformed in the New Testament. In both the Old and New Testaments, God is the sole 'addressee' of his people's prayers, and with the introduction of Trinitarian elements of worship, adoration and intercession, this conviction also remained in the New Testament.

It is anticipated that through synthesising the numerous theologies concerning prayer illustrated in these volumes, they can be merged into an evolving meta-theology of prayer. As the Old and New Testaments form part of the canonical text, the results of prayer in the Old Testament can be brought into play with the results of prayer in the New Testament. This eventually leads to an overarching Biblical Theology of prayer.

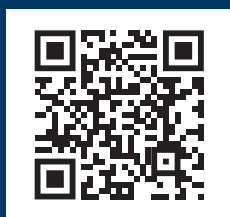
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This book focuses on and expands upon the Biblical Theology of prayer. Biblical Theology, as understood and applied by the authors of this volume, is a thematic approach that concentrates on the final text of the New Testament within the parameters of the Protestant biblical canon. A wealth of relevant material about prayer in the New Testament is brought together, almost overwhelmingly so. Any scholar wishing to study prayer in the New Testament at large or in one of its individual writings will unavoidably have to take cognisance of this study. Whether prayer is worship, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, hymn, confession or simply the assorted Greek words underlying these prayers, this book is the one to take at hand. All the relevant places where prayer occurs in the New Testament are thoroughly exegeted, book-by-book. Especially prominent is the well-grounded way the Greek words and vocabulary dealing with prayer are semantically analysed, using, *inter alia*, Louw & Nida's Greek-English lexicon of semantic domains.

The New Testament records are brought into play with how prayer is employed in the Old Testament to acquire a comprehensive theological perspective on prayer as portrayed in the Bible. A host of theologians, all experts in their respective fields, were brought together for this book and organised exegetical findings into well-structured categories which aid in understanding how prayer was an integral part of the lives of faith communities and individual believers in antiquity.

This book will be a true *vade mecum* concerning studying prayer in the New Testament. It will be a scholar's first stop to obtain the necessary data and systematisations for further investigation.

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