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**A New Testament Theology of God as Father (*Abba*) as the Hermeneutical Key to the Teaching of Christ on Prayer in the Gospels**

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the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity  
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Doctor of Philosophy

Bible Exposition

By

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APPROVAL SHEET

A New Testament Theology of God as Father (*Abba*) as the Hermeneutical Key to the Teaching  
of Christ on Prayer in the Gospels

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## DEDICATION

To my *abba and imma* (mom and dad), to whom besides God Himself, I owe every good thing and blessing this side of Heaven.

Dad, thank you for teaching me what a father is supposed to be. I'm so thankful for you. Perhaps the Lord has allowed me to do so much research and writing on the topic of His Fatherhood because long before my doctoral studies, He placed me under the tutelage of a true father, a man after God's own heart, who introduced me to Abba long before I entered the academy. Thank you for teaching me to be a man of God and letting me be your son. I've always felt so loved, so cared for, so protected, believed in and championed by you and mom. Thank you for loving our family so deeply and sacrificing so much for each of us. You are so loved and honored by us all and I pray I can make you proud.

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## Abstract

When Jesus of Nazareth lifted His eyes to Heaven in Matthew 6:9 and taught His disciples to address Yahweh, the covenant God of Judaism as Father (πατήρ, אב), this was an offense of blasphemy and presumption culpable of death for His Jewish audience; unless it was true (John 5:18). Not only was Father the distinctive and unique term given to God by Jesus, but there is almost universal scholarly consensus that behind the Greek πατήρ is the Aramaic Abba (אבבא, אבא) (Mark 14:36). In both the ANE and Jewish contexts of the Old Testament and first-century Israel, it was unparalleled and unprecedented to address Yahweh directly as Father. To do so with the intimate familial term Abba evokes an intimacy and access no one had ever employed before Jesus. The thesis of this dissertation is that the hermeneutical key to the teaching of Christ concerning prayer is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father.

That is, Christian prayer is categorically distinct from Old Testament or Jewish Prayer because disciples of Christ are invited to approach God in an unprecedented manner as their Abba Father just as the Lord Jesus did, transforming the entirety of the Christian religion. Jesus of Nazareth's use of Abba as a direct address for God in prayer was unprecedented and unparalleled against the religious background of His time. New Testament prayer is categorically distinct when compared with its Old Testament and Jewish counterparts and the explanation is Jesus' use of Abba for God and His instruction for His disciples to do the same. Finally, Jesus' teaching concerning God as Abba is an invitation to His disciples into the heart of Trinitarian love to enjoy the same intimacy and access with Abba that He did. This means that all Christians have unprecedented and unparalleled access to God as His sons and daughters most clearly displayed in the extraordinary privilege and gift of Christian prayer in Jesus' name, empowered by the Holy Spirit, addressed to Abba Father.

## Chapter 1: Introduction, Literature Review, & Methodology

### Introduction

When Jesus of Nazareth lifted His eyes to Heaven in Matthew 6:9 and taught His disciples to address Yahweh, the covenant God of Judaism as Father (πατήρ, אב), this was an offense of blasphemy and presumption culpable of death for His Jewish audience; unless it was true (John 5:18).<sup>1</sup> Not only was Father the distinctive and unique term given to God by Jesus, but there is almost universal scholarly consensus that behind the Greek πατήρ is the Aramaic Abba (אבא) (Mark 14:36), “A term so intimate that few of his contemporaries ever used it to address God.”<sup>2</sup> This begs the important question, was Jesus’ use of Father and especially of Abba distinct or unique for His time and among His contemporaries? If the answer is a resounding yes, this then drives the reader to consider the significance of Jesus’ revelation of and teaching concerning God as Abba Father.<sup>3</sup>

While no one in the Old Testament ever addressed God directly and intimately as their Father like Jesus teaches believers to, in the Gospels it is impossible to escape Jesus’ relationship with God as His Father and His invitation to His disciples to join Him in approaching God in this unprecedented manner which was so foreign and novel at the time. This was true in Jesus’ teaching concerning the Christian life and the kingdom of God as well as being especially evident in His personal relationship with God through prayer always addressed as Father

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<sup>1</sup> For a book-length treatment of this issue and for a seminal work which will be utilized frequently throughout this study, see: Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, Vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 6:9–13.

<sup>3</sup> Pannenberg affirmed this point and the approach of this study, writing, “On the lips of Jesus ‘Father’ became a proper name for God. It embraces every feature in the understanding of God which comes to light in the message of Jesus.” Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 262.

(Abba).<sup>4</sup> Thus, the fatherhood of God is a central theological tenet in the personal life and ministry of Jesus as expressed in each of the Gospels.<sup>5</sup>

A second distinct element of Christ's ministry was His didactic instruction to His disciples concerning Christian prayer.<sup>6</sup> Christ's instruction to His disciples throughout the Gospels presents a radically different approach to prayer than that of the Old Testament or Second Temple Judaism. A few examples include the intimacy of the disciples' address to God as Father in Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2, Christ's parable of the impudence or boldness of the friend at midnight in Luke 11, the widow's persistent prayer in Luke 18, and disciples' confidence and dependence upon God as Father in Matthew 7:7-11 and Luke 11:9-13. These are only a few examples of Christ's transformative teaching concerning prayer that would shape Christian prayer into something almost unrecognizable from its Jewish heritage. It is the relationship between these two significantly distinct Christological theological emphases that this study seeks to bring together to understand and interpret them both in light of the other.<sup>7</sup>

### *Dissertation Topic*

The topic of this dissertation is a New Testament theology of God as Father (Abba) as the hermeneutical key to the teaching of Christ on prayer in the Gospels. The goal of this dissertation

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<sup>4</sup> The only exception to this amidst one hundred and seventy references to God as Father on the lips of Jesus is Christ's quotation of Psalm 22 from the cross. In every other instance, the Lord Jesus addresses God as Father in His prayer.

<sup>5</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 85.

<sup>6</sup> Bockmuehl affirms this approach and the significance and centrality of Jesus' personal prayers and His teaching on prayer, writing, "The single most important expression of both participation in Christ and imitation of Christ was prayer" Markus Bockmuehl, 'Early Christian Prayer and Identity Formation: Introducing the Project,' in *Early Christian prayer and identity formation, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 336*, 1–12, edited by R. Hvalvik and K.O. Sandnes (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 126.

<sup>7</sup> This topic and the significant literature addressing this issue will be addressed most fully in chapter 7 of this dissertation.

will be to evaluate the Gospels' presentation of the life and ministry of the Jesus specifically in His robust treatment of God as Abba Father and its relationship to His instruction on prayer. It is the intersection of Christ's distinct presentation of God as the believer's Abba Father and the connection this has with the believer's access to God through prayer and the intimate relationship they enjoy with Him in the new covenant which this study will explore.

### *Thesis Statement*

The thesis that this dissertation will explore is that the theological and hermeneutical key to understanding the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning prayer is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. That is, Christian prayer is remarkably distinct from Old Testament or Jewish Prayer because disciples of the Christ are invited to approach God as Abba Father just as Jesus did. Christ's invitation to prayer in the secret place with the Father and the promised guarantee of reward is not merely a new approach to prayer, it is an intrinsic shift and essential transformation in the manner Christ's disciples approach their Abba Father in prayer as His sons and daughters.

### *Addressing the Need: Rationale for Study and Expected Contribution*

This study depends upon the significant contributions of many others who have set the stage for this research. There are two major strands of theological focus and emphasis that this project seeks to incorporate and then contribute to. First, as will be demonstrated in the literature review, much work has been done in recent decades concerning the significance of Christ's use of Father and specifically the Aramaic *Abba*. The fact that this was a central theological tenet in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth is one that few scholars deny. While there is a variance of opinion concerning how unique or distinct this perspective of God was against a Jewish background from the Old Testament period until the Second Temple Judaism in which Jesus

lived, almost all agree that at the very least, Jesus highly emphasized and elevated this terminology and view of God more than ever before. Others, such as Jeremias, see Jesus' use of Abba concerning God to be something unprecedented, remarkably distinct from the Jewish approach, and place more theological and interpretive significance on this term. Either way, much progress has been made in highlighting such an important theological belief from the life and ministry of Jesus.

On the other end of the spectrum are an increasing number of modern studies dealing with the topic of biblical prayer. Once again, there have been a number of significant works produced in the preceding decades not only addressing the topic of prayer in a systematic theological manner or from a philosophical angle dealing with the logical mechanics of prayer but rather, there has been a surge of biblical-theological research tracing prayer through the biblical canon.<sup>8</sup> This is a major contribution in increasing focus and biblical treatment of one of the Bible's most central themes. These biblical-theological works have emphasized the unfolding revelation not only of covenants or the redemptive history of salvation but also how this affects a developing Scriptural understanding of prayer. As the covenants unfold and the promises of Yahweh are fulfilled in and through the Messiah, there is a seismic shift in the Bible's presentation of prayer and how New Covenant believers engage in it.<sup>9</sup> While there is much work yet to be done in this field, biblical theology has made key advances and crucial contributions.

What then is the need for this study? What is the rationale for this research project addressing a New Testament theology of God as Father (Abba) as the hermeneutical key to the teaching of

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<sup>8</sup> These works will be briefly treated in the literature review and more fully in chapter 7.

<sup>9</sup> This statement is predicated upon the foundational claim of this study that Jesus' unprecedented and unparalleled use of Abba Father for God and His instruction for His disciples to do the same transformed Christian prayer. This is represented most clearly in the intimacy and access believers have to God as His sons and daughters expressed through their address of God as their Abba Father.

Christ on prayer in the Gospels? The answer is found in this study's unique approach to examining the convergence of these two fundamental biblical doctrines. Few if any scholars have drawn attention to the correlation between the discontinuity of the Old Testament's scarce and practically non-existent theology of God as the personal Father of believers, the explosion of this language and imagery in the Gospels especially concerning prayer, and the extraordinary shift that takes place between the two Testament's with the New Testament abounding in Fatherhood language for God and believers' direct access to Him as Abba. Believers' intimacy and access to God as Abba Father demonstrated most clearly in Christ's invitation to draw near to Him as such through prayer and the impact this has upon the theology of the rest of the New Testament is an insightful connection that has not been explored at length.

Thus, this study is unique from others in exploring the connection between the novelty of God as Abba Father in the New Covenant which became a key tenet of first-century Christian theology and the implications this has upon believers' relationship with God through prayer. That is, based upon the research that ensues, this research project posits that the theological and hermeneutical key to understanding the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning prayer is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father.

These claims are predicated upon two central theological conclusions which will be treated in this work. First, in agreement with Jeremias, while there is the beginning formation of an Old Testament understanding of God as Father, there is nothing that resembles the intimacy and access signified in Christ's address of God as Abba and in His invitation to His disciples to do the same. To verify this claim, this study will investigate three major elements of Jewish theology to grasp the significance and nuance of Jesus' teaching against the Jewish backdrop. These include first the entirety of the Old Testament, second, the intertestamental writings

including the Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, and third, key works from the first-century period representing the cultural theological moment during the life and ministry of Jesus. If, as this study posits is true, the New Testament view of God as the personal Father of every believer is distinct from all ancient Jewish backgrounds and can be attributed to Jesus' unique use of the Aramaic Abba in His life and ministry, this is the first foundational theological discovery that must be accounted for.

Second, this research project is also dependent upon the belief that Christian prayer is remarkably distinct from Old Testament or Jewish Prayer because disciples of Christ are invited to approach God as Abba Father just as Jesus did and taught them to do following His example. Prayer is certainly a major element and theme of the Old Testament and subsequent Jewish history and writing. However, the approach and manner in which Jesus prays and instructs His disciples to do so is also another major development in the redemptive-historical timeline unfolding throughout the Scriptures. Once again, how believers are instructed to pray is not merely a new approach to prayer, it is an intrinsic shift and essential transformation in the manner Christ's disciples approach their Abba Father in prayer based upon the New Covenant. Believers, through Jesus Christ, have been given intimacy and access to the Father in a way that Old Testament saints could only dream of. How is this possible? What is this invitation predicated upon? In nearly every instance in the Gospels, this novel approach to prayer is directly linked to God as Father. Thus, it is plausible, and this study will seek to explore whether or not the secret to believer's new access to God is their New Covenant identity as sons and daughters of Abba Father.

In conclusion, this study's major contribution is not merely further work on the two theological topics addressed above; God as Abba Father and New Testament prayer according to



Jesus. Rather, it is the juncture of these two major theological doctrines and their correlation to one another that has not been explored at length. Building upon the best scholarship in both fields, this research project seeks to uncover a new theological link between these two central Christian beliefs and demonstrate how they are dependent upon one another and just how beautiful and revolutionary the Lord Jesus was against a Jewish backdrop in offering believer's unprecedented intimacy and access to Yahweh because, through Jesus, Yahweh can be called and approached and enjoyed as Abba Father.

This is a truly remarkable, extraordinary, scandalous, shocking, and unexpected development in biblical theology first for the Jewish people, Yahweh's chosen and covenant sons and daughters, and now, for all Gentiles and those who are grafted into Abba's family through the death and resurrection of His son. It is the distinctive and novel nature of Christ's approach to God as Abba Father and believers' intimacy and access to Him through prayer that shines brightly as one more beautiful element of the multifaceted diamond of the Gospel and the blessings of the New Covenant made available through the Lord Jesus, His and our Abba Father, and the precious Holy Spirit.

### **Methodology: Biblical Theological Historical-Grammatical Exegesis**

As was hinted at above, the research methodology of this study will adhere primarily to historical-grammatical exegesis and biblical theology. Or, the methodology and approach of this project can be referred to as Biblical Theological Historical-Grammatical Exegesis. The thesis of this research project depends upon historical-grammatical exegesis of the biblical text.

Employing historical-grammatical exegetical principles, the bulk of this dissertation will consist of detailed exegesis of the biblical text including attention to pertinent historical, literary, and theological issues which have direct relevance to the topic. Then based upon these exegetical

conclusions, the thesis will be tested against the Scripture in a biblical theological manner and demonstrated to not only be congruent with biblical teaching but to be a helpful and insightful hermeneutical key to Christ's teaching on prayer in the Gospels concerning His revelation of God as Abba. Thus, historical-grammatical exegesis and biblical theology are the two determinative and guiding methodological principles for this study. Each of these will be defined and explained below for insight into the methodology of this project.

### *Historical-Grammatical Exegesis*

Three works are foundational in establishing the historical-grammatical methodological approach of this study. The first is *the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* by Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson. The hermeneutical approach and methodology presented in this text and adopted by this study affirms a hermeneutical triad that emphasizes the significance of the historical context/setting, the literary context, and the passage's theological message, "By starting with the big picture or broadest category, canon, and moving from there to genre and finally to the study of a concrete literary unit in its discourse context, our method embodies the principle of interpreting the parts (words) in light of the whole (canon and genre)."<sup>10</sup> This *Hermeneutical Triad* is significant for this study in emphasizing first, the influence that the historical elements of the text have upon subsequent exegesis. While this study focuses primarily on the New Testament, this material is inextricably impacted by the historical material from the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and the surrounding first-century Graco-Roman environment of the New Testament. The same is true of the literary background and features of the New Testament text, and finally, both the theological background and themes.

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<sup>10</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: 2011, Kregel Academic), 25.

A second insightful and influential work guiding the research methodology of this study is Grant Osborne's *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. Osborne's primary contribution to our hermeneutical methodology here is that biblical interpretation entails a "'Spiral' from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today."<sup>11</sup> This approach stresses two central interpretive convictions. First, the centrality of authorial intention. That is, "The goal of evangelical hermeneutics is quite simple-to discover the intention of the Author/author (author = inspired human author; Author = God who inspires the text)."<sup>12</sup> This is a core presupposition of evangelical hermeneutics. The biblical interpreter is seeking to understand the human author's intent in writing while affirming that behind them stands God as the ultimate divine author. The interpretive task is to discover the authorial intent which stands in the divine balance between divine and human author. Thus, if the text is to be rightly understood, it must be done so through the key historical, literary, and theological elements of the biblical text as intended by the author. Simultaneously, as E. D. Hirsch so helpfully introduced and Osborne affirmed, authorial intent also signifies an important distinction between "meaning" and "significance."<sup>13</sup> Proper exegesis demands a hermeneutical sensitivity to both "the original intended meaning for the author and his readers" as well as its "significance for the modern reader."<sup>14</sup> *The Hermeneutical Spiral* presented by Osborne is the journey from "meaning" to "significance," from the ancient text to the modern context. This is a second key methodological approach affirmed by this study which is central to the exegetical work that follows.

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<sup>11</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 23.

<sup>12</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> E. D. Hirsch Jr, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 103-126.

<sup>14</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

A final work that helps guide the research methodology of this study incorporates elements from both *the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, and *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, is Richard Fuhr and Andreas Köstenberger's *Inductive Bible Study*. This is an insightful and practical work that integrates both of the previous work's perspectives and presents an application of the exegetical conclusions in a practical methodology. In their words, "Building upward from the premise that the Bible is historical, literary, and theological and should be studied in terms of these three dimensions, the inductive method builds a framework for methodical, step-by-step study that embraces all facets of the hermeneutical triad."<sup>15</sup> This is a guiding methodological approach that marks this study in affirming both the significance of the historical, literary, and theological elements of the text and examining them through the classic inductive Bible study method.

In summary, the research methodology of this study affirms and employs historical-grammatical exegesis of the biblical text. As the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God, the first task of biblical exegesis is to discover the meaning of the original author's intent and then interpret and contextualize this to the significance for the modern reader. Historical-grammatical exegesis is performed when attention is given to the historical background, literary features, and theological message of the biblical text. It is in the proper understanding and convergence of these three central elements of the Scripture that proper meaning is achieved. Thus, this is the research methodological approach that this study will follow.

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Alan. Fuhr and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application through the Lenses of History, Literature, and Theology* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016).

## *Biblical Theology*

The second research methodological distinctive of this study is a biblical theological approach and interpretation of the text.<sup>16</sup> Biblical theology is diverse and definitions vary among its adherents and practitioners.<sup>17</sup> An introductory definition provided by the *New Dictionary Of Biblical Theology* is that biblical theology is the

Theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.<sup>18</sup>

Two elements are key here which are marks of the biblical theological approach. First, biblical theology seeks to understand the meaning and intention of the Scripture in its original context. Each biblical author and text is treated on its own and allowed to speak for itself within its unique place in the biblical story of redemptive history. A biblical-theological approach acknowledges and affirms the unity and diversity of the Christian Scriptures. There is a diversity of perspectives represented within the canon and between the Testaments that does not negate the unity of the theological witness of the Scriptures. Thus, biblical theology explores the unity amongst the diversity of biblical authors and allows each to contribute their unique voice to the unified theology of the Bible.

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<sup>16</sup> For helpful introductions to the task of biblical theology as a theological discipline, see: Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2013); John Goldingay, *Biblical Theology: The God of the Christian Scriptures* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2016); Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003); Ben Witherington, *Biblical Theology: The Convergence of the Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Desmond T. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (La Vergne: IVP, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> For an introduction and survey to five distinct approaches to biblical theology which represent the majority of views, see: Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary Of Biblical Theology*, xxxiii.

Second, biblical theology pays special attention to the nature of unfolding revelation in the biblical story of redemptive history. Unlike systematic theology which synthesizes the variety of Scriptures on a topic into a unified position, biblical theology traces ideas as they unfold and develop throughout the biblical story. The nature of God's unfolding revelation to humanity throughout history demands a sensitivity to the theological developments of redemptive history. This is especially relevant to the topic of this dissertation. Jesus' use of Abba in relation to God the Father and the explosion of New Testament usage after His life and ministry represents a significant development in redemptive history. Biblical theology notes the significance of this shift and can more accurately understand the nature and significance of this major theological development in light of Old Testament Scripture and an awareness of the overarching narrative of Scripture and redemptive history. Thus, as the *New Dictionary Of Biblical Theology* notes,

Biblical theology is principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole and, to achieve this, it must work with the mutual interaction of the literary, historical, and theological dimensions of the various corpora, and with the interrelationships of these within the whole canon of Scripture. Only in this way do we take proper account of the fact that God has spoken to us in Scripture.<sup>19</sup>

This demonstrates as well the integration between historical-grammatical exegesis and biblical theology. Historical grammatical exegesis as the hermeneutical treatment of the historical, literary, and theological elements of the Bible incorporated with a biblical theological awareness of God's unfolding revelation to His people throughout redemptive history are the two defining characteristics of the methodological research approach of this dissertation. Therefore, the

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary Of Biblical Theology*, xiv.

exegetical work that follows in this study will be marked by the implementation of historical-grammatical exegesis and a biblical theological approach.<sup>20</sup>

## Literature Review

As previously stated, this dissertation depends on the faithful exegetical labors of many who have previously addressed these topics. Therefore, here we present a literature review of the most significant theological and exegetical works addressing both of these issues. Because this dissertation seeks to find the exegetical connection between these two distinct theological matters, both the field of Christ's teaching on prayer as well as literature addressing His use of the Aramaic Abba to address God the Father will be surveyed. Some works will overlap and address both of these topics. However, many works surveyed will specifically address one of the two major themes of this study. Thus, this literature review will distinguish between those works which address each topic individually or which are relevant to both issues.

Joachim Jeremias is the seminal and one of the most influential scholars known for his work concerning God as Abba Father in the life and ministry of Jesus. Any work that treats the topic of the Fatherhood of God and Jesus' use of Abba in the New Testament always includes reference to and interaction with Jeremias. Many of his works are significant concerning God as Abba Father. The primary and most influential of his works is *The Prayers of Jesus*.<sup>21</sup> Nearly

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<sup>20</sup> There are a variety of works which follow this kind of methodological approach to the text. For a survey of biblical theological works which embrace historical-grammatical exegesis, see the following: Desmond T. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009); Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); J. Scott. Duvall and J. Daniel. Hays, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019); Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, Kevin McFadden and D.A Carson, *Biblical Theology According to the Apostles: How the Earliest Christians Told the Story of Israel* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2020); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1981); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*.

every modern work seeking to further research on God as Father, Jesus' use of Abba, or Christians' relationship with God as Father must first begin with Jeremias' *The Prayers of Jesus*.<sup>22</sup>

Several elements make *The Prayers of Jesus* especially significant. First, Jeremias was one of the first scholars to draw attention to the theological significance of Christ's address of God not merely as Father but specifically using the Aramaic Abba. Jeremias' argumentation will be explored later in this study. Based upon detailed exegesis of the biblical text and related background material, Jeremias concludes, "We can say quite definitely that there is *no analogy at all* in the whole literature of Jewish prayer for God being addressed as Abba."<sup>23</sup> From this point forward, every scholar has had to interact with Jeremias' claims.

Second, Jeremias' work includes a thorough examination of each instance of Fatherhood language for God in the Old Testament as well as in the Ancient Near Eastern context of the Old Testament. Jeremias bases his views of God as Father on the biblical foundation of the Jewish Scriptures as well as examining the Old Testament against its ancient religious neighbors. This informs the cultural and theological environment from which Judaism came. Finally, Jeremias also includes a detailed examination of ancient Palestinian Judaism. This is especially significant in understanding how the Old Testament idea of God as Father developed during the intertestamental period and how similar or unique Jesus' use of Abba was in relation to His Jewish predecessors and contemporaries. Jeremias' work on these topics is not limited to *The Prayers of Jesus* but is also continued in his works *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*, *New Testament Theology, Rediscovering the Parables*, *The Lord's Prayer*, and *The Sermon on*

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<sup>22</sup> For example, a search in Google scholar shows that at the time of writing this dissertation, there are nearly 7,000 works citing Jeremias' *The Prayers of Jesus*.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57.



*the Mount*. This makes Jeremias one of the seminal and most influential voices in the discussion concerning God as Abba father and its theological implications concerning prayer. For, Jeremias concludes, “The complete novelty and uniqueness of Abba as an address to God in the prayers of Jesus shows that it expresses the heart of Jesus' relationship to God.”<sup>24</sup>

Another influential voice in the discussion of Christ's use of Abba for God the Father is James Barr. Barr and Jeremias stand at two ends of the discussion as influential opinions that differ in their conclusions. Barr's most popular work dealing with this issue has the memorable title, *'Abbā Isn't 'Daddy*. As the name of the article implies, Barr writes a critique of Jeremias' argumentation and conclusion and offers his own perspective of the meaning of Christ's address to God using the Aramaic Abba. Barr agrees with Jeremias in several places. For example, in another of Barr's works, *'Abba, Father' and the Familiarity of Jesus' Speech*, which addresses the same topic and interacts directly with Jeremias and his claims, Barr writes, “The importance of the fatherhood of God for Jesus is amply evidenced in many places and is not in question here.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Barr agrees with Jeremias and affirms his emphasis on the significance of Christ's teaching concerning God the Father. However, Barr continues, “The only question is the degree of its connection with the sole term 'Abba', and the nuance that is imparted to it through that connection.”<sup>26</sup> This phrase here is an apt summation of where Barr differs and challenges Jeremias; the frequency of Jesus' use of Abba and its cultural, historical, and linguistic significance in the first century.

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<sup>24</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 67.

<sup>25</sup> James Barr, “‘Abba, Father’ and the Familiarity of Jesus’ Speech.” *Theology*, 91(741), 1988, 179.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Barr explores these two points at length in *'Abbā Isn't 'Daddy'*.<sup>27</sup> While affirming some of Jeremias' views, Barr has four major conclusions where he differs from Jeremias and seeks to add further nuance to a biblical understanding of Abba. First, and perhaps Barr's primary point of concern is that Abba should not be understood as a childlike expression comparable with daddy, but as a "solemn responsible address to a father."<sup>28</sup> Barr admits that Jeremias never explicitly argues that Abba should be understood as the modern English "daddy," but Barr states that this is the implication of Jeremias' writing.<sup>29</sup> Second, whereas Jeremias argues that behind each New Testament example of Father in the Gospels stands the Aramaic word Abba on the lips of Jesus as the *ipsissima vox Jesu*, Barr claims that this is impossible to prove and is thus an untenable position.<sup>30</sup> Third, Barr posits that Abba could either be Hebrew or Aramaic and is not the only word that can be employed to express this concept.<sup>31</sup> Finally, while Barr says it is possible that addressing God as Abba originated with Jesus, he expresses doubt that this is truly a "quite central keystone in our total understanding of him."<sup>32</sup>

Jeremias and Barr have been discussed at length because, in modern research, nearly every author addressing the issue of the fatherhood of God in the Gospels and the New Testament sides either with Jeremias or Barr or finds a mediating position somewhere in between. One's interpretation of Jesus' reference not merely to God as Father which is undeniably significant in the Gospels but to the implications of His use of Abba has major hermeneutical implications.

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<sup>27</sup> James Barr, "'Abbā Isn't 'Daddy.'" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (1988): 28-47.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, Barr and Jeremias represent two major approaches to Jesus' use of Abba in the Gospels and are influential theological voices in the continued dialogue. While the examples and claims of these authors will be examined and employed within this study, this study affirms Jeremias' views and is therefore highly influenced and impacted by his exegetical conclusions concerning Jesus' use of Abba and the significance this has for a New Testament theology and interpretation of Christ's use of Abba.

A scholar with a similar perspective to Barr is Willem VanGemeran. Writing a response to Jeremias at the same time as Barr, *Abbā' in the Old Testament*, VanGemeran also critiques Jeremias' conclusions concerning the implications of Jesus' use of Abba to address God the Father.<sup>33</sup> Barr and VanGemeran add a nuanced view to Jeremias' seeking to demonstrate the continuity between the Old Testament's presentation of God as Father and Jesus' continuation and intensification of this theme in the unfolding story of redemptive history.

A significant work that adds to an Old Testament understanding of God as Father and helps shed interpretive light on the New Testament is a doctoral dissertation by David Tasker entitled, *The Fatherhood of God: An Exegetical Study from the Hebrew Scriptures*. Tasker's work is beneficial in that it begins with a survey of the fatherhood of the gods in Ancient Near Eastern literature, performs a thorough analysis of the primary texts in the Old Testament that address the Fatherhood of God from a biblical perspective, and concludes with a summation of a biblical theology of God as Father and the key implications of his research.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Willem A. VanGemeran, "Abbā' in the Old Testament." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 4 (December 1988): 385–98.

<sup>34</sup> David Russell Tasker, "The Fatherhood of God: An Exegetical Study from the Hebrew Scriptures." Andrews University, Dissertations & Theses Global, 2002.

Along these lines, another beneficial study contributing to a theological understanding of God as Father in the Old Testament is Christopher Wright's, *Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament*.<sup>35</sup> Wright affirms both the novelty of the intimacy and familiarity with which Jesus addressed God as Father while at the same time tracing the continuity of this idea through the Old Testament text.

One of the primary issues pertaining to this study is seeking to understand Jesus' use of Abba and His frequent address of God as Father in relation to three major background sources; Ancient Near Eastern Literature, the Old Testament text, and works from Second Temple Judaism. From these three categories, two kinds of works are meaningful to this study. These are works that relate to the fatherhood of God as well as works related to prayer including the presence or absence of Father language or imagery. Due to the vast amount of material in these categories from these three periods, the works which address both prayer and Father language for God are given preference.<sup>36</sup> There is growing attention being given especially to the material from Second Temple Judaism and thus a growing number of works addressing this topic.

A few examples of these resources include the following. First, Nijay Gupta has a relevant study of Abba language utilized by Christ compared to similar language in the Babylonian Talmud in *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism*.<sup>37</sup> Gupta's work is significant for it interprets Jesus' language against a more contemporary Jewish one as well as provides further texts and resources to continue this discussion. Geza Vermes does something

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing God through the Old Testament Three Volumes in One* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> The primary material from these significant periods is addressed in chapters 2-4 and is not included in this literature review.

<sup>37</sup> Nijay K. Gupta, *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2018).

similar in his work, *Jesus in the Jewish World*.<sup>38</sup> Vermes helps shed light on Jesus' ministry from the context of first-century Palestine as well as in light of significant literature from the period including the Dead Sea Scrolls. Three insightful works addressing the topic of prayer from these periods which can be grouped together are, *The Development of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*,<sup>39</sup> *Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions*,<sup>40</sup> and *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature*.<sup>41</sup> These three works are especially significant for they provide a window into the prayer and praise of Ancient Israel and the significant background and contemporary material from the New Testament.

Progressing from key background works and those focused primarily on the Old Testament, there are a variety of influential studies as well continuing this discussion into the New Testament and focusing specifically on Christ's usage here. The first is a classic work by A.T. Robertson, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning God the Father*.<sup>42</sup> Here Robertson explores Jesus' teaching concerning God as Father and the significant implications this has. Robertson's view is that rather than being radically new, Jesus' view of God as Father is a continuation of this significant Old Testament theme. Another classic work at a more lay level emphasizing the

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<sup>38</sup> Geza Vermes, *Jesus in the Jewish World* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Mark J. Boda, Daniel K. Falk, and Rodney Alan Werline, *The Development of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> Renate Egger-Wenzel and Stefan C. Reif, *Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions: Emotions Associated with Jewish Prayer in and Around the Second Temple Period* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> Eileen M. Schuller, Jeremy. Penner, Ken M. Penner, and Cecilia Wassen, *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays on Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the Occasion of Her 65th Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> A.T. Robertson, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning God the Father* (London: Forgotten Books, 2012).

centrality of God as Father in the life and ministry of Jesus and at the heart of the Christian faith is *The Forgotten Father* by Thomas A. Smail.<sup>43</sup>

A comprehensive examination of Jesus' use of Fatherhood language for God with specific attention given to Abba and Jeremias' work is Marianne Thompson's *The Promise of the Father*.<sup>44</sup> Thompson affirms the influence Jeremias has had upon all subsequent theological treatment of the Fatherhood of God and Jesus' use of Abba.<sup>45</sup> Once again, anyone dealing with this topic must first grapple with Jeremias' conclusions concerning the novelty and significance of Jesus' approach to God as Father with the Aramaic Abba. Thompson's review of scholars who agree with Jeremias, and disagree, and her summation and response to his views are significant. She also includes important work on God as Father in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism, and an analysis of the material in the Gospels concerning Jesus' use of Father and Abba and the theological implications of these views.

There is also modern growing interest in the implications of Jesus' use of the Aramaic Abba concerning God as Father. Beyond larger more general works, there is specialized research being performed directly dealing with Abba in a continuation of the discussion begun primarily by Jeremias. Two examples are provided here. The first is *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology* by Thomas Caulley.<sup>46</sup> In addition to exploring the importance and connotation of Abba in the

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980).

<sup>44</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Scott Caulley, "The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32 (4) 2022: 394–416.

Gospels employed by Christ, Caulley also seeks to incorporate the other New Testament instances of Abba into his holistic understanding of Abba in Mark's Gospel.

An insightful addition to the discussion concerning Jesus' use of Abba for God as Father is a study entitled, *Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba: Its Sources and Impact on the Idea of the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament* by Stefan Szymik.<sup>47</sup> Szymik's study is influential in its affirmation of Jeremias' claims and as a modern defense of the novelty and centrality of Abba to the life, teaching, and theology of Jesus. Szymik writes that "Without Jesus of Nazareth and his teaching the extraordinary development of the theological thought about God's fatherhood recorded in the New Testament writings would have been unthinkable."<sup>48</sup> Thus, Szymik represents a direct modern defense and affirmation of Jeremias' views concerning the theological centrality of Jesus' use of abba.

A significant development in modern theological research is a growing interest in biblical-theological treatments of prayer. These are especially noteworthy for they treat one of the central topics of this dissertation in the same biblical-theological manner that this study seeks to do. Four texts specifically represent this kind of work which traces the topic of prayer through the Old and New Testaments in a biblical-theological manner paying special attention to how this theme develops throughout the canon.

The first is *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer* by Gary Millar.<sup>49</sup> Millar notes that while extensive studies on prayer have been conducted regarding Christ, the Gospels, Paul, Psalms, and others, he was not aware of any whole biblical theology of

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<sup>47</sup> Stefan Szymik, "Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba: Its Sources and Impact on the Idea of the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament." *Verbum Vitae* 38, no. 2 (2020): 485–502.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 497.

<sup>49</sup> Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

prayer beginning in Genesis and working through all the biblical material until Revelation.<sup>50</sup> In his words, he is aware of “No single comprehensive treatment of the unfolding story of what the Bible says about prayer.”<sup>51</sup> This is Millar’s unique approach to the topic and what he views as his greatest contribution made by the study. Millar supports a strong continuity between the Testaments and their approach to prayer.

Similar to Millar, Patrick D. Miller also wrote a biblical-theological survey of the *The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* which at the time of authorship, the *Journal of Religion* called the “Most comprehensive English-language study of the issue of biblical prayer.”<sup>52</sup> As the name implies, Miller is concerned with examining the biblical text to develop a scriptural theology of prayer in the Old and New Testaments. Of special concern to Miller is the relationship between religious faith and prayer in the Scriptures. Miller’s work is detailed, and thorough, and makes a significant contribution to understanding the “structure and shape” of biblical faith as expressed through prayer.”<sup>53</sup>

Richard Longenecker makes a unique contribution in His New Testament theology of prayer, *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament*.<sup>54</sup> The exegetical work performed by the group of contributing scholars concerning New Testament prayer is excellent, but it is the background research and conclusions that are especially valuable. The first section of the work consists of four essays aimed at establishing a historical and theological background to New

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<sup>50</sup> Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Kiley, “They Cried to the Lord (Book Review).” *Journal of Religion* 76 (October 1996): 615–16.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>54</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co, 2001).



Testament prayer. The first is “*Prayer in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible.*” Here, the author not only surveys the Hebrew Scriptures but demonstrates where Jewish prayer differed from the ANE cultures around them. Next, is “*Prayer in the Greco-Roman World.*” Here, both Jewish and Christian prayer are shown to be countercultural in the Greco-Roman context as lacking many of their pagan elements and reflecting a much more personal and intimate relationship. The third and fourth essays are related in dealing with the intertestamental and Second Temple Judaism perspectives on prayer. These are “*Prayer in Jewish Life of the First Century as Background to Early Christianity*” (43-65) and “*Prayer in the Dead Sea Scrolls*” (66-88). This material is often overlooked in understanding the perspective of Jesus, a first-century Jew, regarding prayer. Thus, Longenecker’s work contributes greatly to a New Testament theology of prayer informed by the pertinent historical, literary, and theological background sources.

Finally, David Crump contributes a focused study on *A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer*. The author works his way through the New Testament corpus beginning with the Synoptic Gospels and concluding with the book of Revelation before offering a summary and concluding remarks. The intention of Crump’s work is simple and straightforward, “The task at hand is very specific: to construct a New Testament theology of petitionary prayer.”<sup>55</sup> The focus is on rigorous exegesis of select biblical passages and from these findings, to allow the New Testament itself to form a theology of petitionary prayer.

While each of the four above works treated either whole biblical theologies of prayer or the New Testament alone, two works of special significance to this study are those that treat only the prayers of Jesus. Jeremiah is one example of this already addressed above. Two more modern

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<sup>55</sup> David Crump, *Knocking on Heavens' Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 16.

works are mentioned here. First, is *The Prayers of Jesus* by Mark Jones.<sup>56</sup> Jones' work is a simple exegetical survey of each prayer prayed by Jesus. For the study here, this is a helpful introduction to each instance of the form and content of Christ's prayers as they are explored concerning God as Father and specifically through the lens of Christ's usage of Abba. The second related work is *Finding Jesus in His Prayers* by Stephen Shoemaker. Similar to Jones, Shoemaker explores each of the prayers of Jesus with a special emphasis on Jesus' use of Abba and the importance this held for His own theology and the repercussions this has for a New Testament theology of prayer and believers' relationship with God the father as Abba. For example, Shoemaker writes,

I work with the assumption of the correctness of Joachim Jeremias—that behind every 'pater' in the Gospels there is the echo of Jesus' Aramaic name for God, Abba. Therefore, I have chosen to translate the Greek word backward into Abba rather than forward into the English word 'father.'<sup>57</sup>

Thus, Shoemaker adds to the weight of those who affirm both the novelty of Christ's address to God as Abba and the revolutionary consequences this had for first-century Jews and Christians of all generations.

A final category of important works will be briefly considered here. One of the significant points of this dissertation is the continuity or discontinuity between Old Testament and New Testament prayer. This research study explores the intersection between prayer in the two Covenants and specifically where the Fatherhood of God is involved. Thus, works treating prayer in the Old Testament are meaningful in forming an Old Testament theology of prayer that

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<sup>56</sup> Mark Jones, *The Prayers of Jesus: Listening to and Learning from Our Savior* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> Stephen H. Shoemaker, *Finding Jesus in His Prayers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), Introduction.

can be compared and contrasted with the New Testament and Christ's relationship with God as Abba and His disciples' invitation to pray to Him as such.

The first two works are by Walter Brueggemann. These are *Great Prayers of the Old Testament* and *Worship in Ancient Israel*. In *Great Prayers of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann presents expositions of twelve significant prayers in the Old Testament with the intention of developing a synthesis of the Old Testament's presentation of prayer.<sup>58</sup> In *Worship in Ancient Israel*, Brueggemann explores ancient Israel's worship traditions and specifically the themes, central texts, prayers, festivals, and practices of that worship.<sup>59</sup> Both works make a needed contribution to prayer, worship, and religious practices of ancient Israel as necessary background to Jesus' practice of the same and His teaching. Walter Kaiser does something similar in his work, *I Will Lift My Eyes Unto the Hills: Learning from the Great Prayers of the Old Testament*.<sup>60</sup> This is another survey of the central prayers and related texts in the Old Testament. Finally, Herbert Lockyer in his work, *All the Prayers of the Bible*, also seeks to present a synthesis of the Scripture's example of prayer in both Testaments.<sup>61</sup>

### **Chapter by Chapter Synopsis**

Chapters two, three, and four together will attempt to establish a significant historical, literary, and theological background for Jesus' use of Abba Father as a direct address for Yahweh. The aim of chapter two is to examine the relevant Ancient Near Eastern and Israelite historical and cultural material to form a cultural and theological background to God as Father in

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<sup>58</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Great Prayers of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).

<sup>60</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *I Will Lift My Eyes Unto the Hills: Learning from the Great Prayers of the Old Testament*. Ashland: Lexham Press, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All the Prayers of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1959).

this context. The question is whether any religious material in the ANE compares to Jesus' understanding of or approach to God as Father. Also, this chapter seeks to explore whether the Old Testament references to God as Father were unique when compared with their religious neighbors or if there is a similarity in their theological perspectives. Concerning the Israelite conception of Father, the biblical presentation of what fatherhood ought to be is helpful in formulating the imagery to which Yahweh appealed in revealing Himself as Father and will thus be surveyed first before the rest of the Old Testament material.

Chapter three seeks to establish an Old Testament and Jewish understanding of God and investigate if the Fatherhood of God was a key idea throughout the Old Testament. While there are a few Old Testament texts that portray God as a Father to Israel, there is nothing like the explicit teaching of Jesus anywhere in the Old Testament. The thesis of this study is largely impacted by the centrality of Jesus' approach to God as Abba and its novelty against a traditional Old Testament and Jewish background

The bulk of this chapter will consist in a summary of key Old Testament texts dealing with God as Father either in direct reference or in metaphor, allegory, or poetic imagery will be examined. The goal is a biblical theological survey of the Old Testament's presentation of Yahweh and if the Old Testament laid a theological foundation and prepared New Testament readers for Christ's revelation of God Abba. In addition, key Old Testament language for God is explored. Here the relevant Hebrew & Aramaic words for father are analyzed not only concerning God but also in common, everyday language, and familial interactions in the Jewish world. The goal is to treat each uniquely within its own historical, literary, and theological environment to gain a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the Old Testament's presentation of God as Father.

In chapter four, the same approach will be employed as in the previous two chapters concerning all of the relevant Second Temple Jewish literature. Here, the focus is on the non-canonical Jewish prayers and relevant intertestamental writings including the Apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, and other relevant literature from the period. If the thesis of this study is to be proved, it must be demonstrated that Jesus' approach to prayer was distinct from both Old Testament and non-canonical Jewish approaches. Thus, primary Jewish literature from the period is analyzed here to explore this idea. What will be demonstrated is that while there are a few relevant texts and prayers that contain Father language for God, none of the texts addressed from the ANE, Old Testament, or Second Temple period ever address Yahweh using Abba or in the same manner as Jesus in the Gospels.

In chapter five, Jesus of Nazareth's unprecedented and unparalleled employment of the intimate and familial Aramaic Abba as a direct reference for Yahweh will be investigated. This will begin with an extensive linguistic, cultural, and historical examination of the Aramaic term Abba in the first century in relation to other relevant Hebrew and Greek words used about God throughout the New Testament. Then, the usage of Abba and Father language God in the New Testament will be examined. Priority will be given to Jesus' teaching concerning God as Father and His direct addresses of Him throughout the Gospels. While the Gospels are the primary focus, brief consideration is given as well to other texts throughout the New Testament for a more robust understanding of the usage of these terms throughout. The novelty of Christ's use of this term concerning God and its subsequent usage by the Apostle Paul and the early church merits detailed study not only of this word but its implications for Christians based upon the example and instruction of Christ.

In Chapter 6, this topic will be addressed in further detail and traced in a biblical theological manner through the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels. Just as was done in the Old Testament, the same methodological approach is employed here in the Gospels. While other pertinent texts outside the Gospels are considered, the priority of exegetical significance is given specifically to Christ's teaching and instruction and His relationship with God as Father in the Gospels. Thus, a detailed section on each Gospel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are included to understand Christ's usage of Abba in relationship to God as Father as well as any pertinent texts with exegetical significance for better understanding the centrality of God as Abba Father in the New Testament and the transformational affects this had upon the Christian religion.

Chapter seven begins to explore the significant implications of the thesis of this study. The biblical theological survey and all of the findings of the research are now employed to draw theological conclusions about the relationship between God as Abba Father, Christ's teaching on prayer, and the implications this has for Christians and the Christian religion. The goal is to integrate the two central themes of this study; God as Abba Father in the New Testament and Christ's unprecedented transformative teaching on prayer. Based upon the exegetical foundations of the first chapters of this study, these final chapters seek to synthesize these findings into helpful and significant theological insights.

First, this chapter opens by addressing the impact and theological significance of God as Abba Father in the New Testament and the early church. Here, this study moves outside of the Gospels to present an introductory survey of the New Testament authors' overwhelming approach to God as Father as the direct result of Christ's unprecedented and transformational personal example and teaching. Two major areas will be explored here. First, Paul's use of Αββα ὁ Πατήρ to Greek-speaking Christians in Corinth and Rome and its theological significance for

the early church. Second, the Explosion of Father language in the New Testament and the supremacy of God as Abba in the new covenant. Each of these points affirms the thesis of this study that a theology of God as Abba (Father) is the hermeneutical key to the teaching of Christ on prayer in the Gospels.

Second, Christ's teaching on prayer and its categorically distinct nature from Old Testament prayer by the intimacy and accessibility of the privilege of addressing God as Abba Father will be explored. If Christ's instruction to His disciples throughout the Gospels concerning prayer is distinct from the Old Testament portrait of prayer, then the question must be asked, what has changed? The thesis to be tested is that it is Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father that has radically transformed believers' manner of approaching God, the practice of Christian prayer, and the entirety of the New Testament religion. Significant attention will be given to Paul's theology of adoption ( $\nu\iota\omicron\theta\epsilon\sigma\iota\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ ) as the means by which believers are adopted into the family of God in and through the work of Jesus the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, in chapter eight, the impact and applications of a New Testament theology of God as Father (*abba*) in relation to prayer for individual believers, theology, and the contemporary church will conclude this study. Based upon the findings of this study, relevant applications will be offered for each of these unique spheres with the goal of making a beneficial contribution to the academy, the church, and the lives of believers.

## **Chapter 2: Ancient Near Eastern and Israelite Historical and Cultural Background to God as Father**

### **Introduction: Ancient Near Eastern and Israelite Historical and Cultural Background to God as Father**

This dissertation is concerned with Jesus' use of Abba in the New Testament and its relationship to prayer and the impact His relationship with God as Abba as expressed in His prayers has for believers. However, Jesus did not live and minister within a historical vacuum. Rather, He came to the Jewish people at a unique moment in redemptive history not to abolish the covenant Yahweh had made with them but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17). Thus, to properly understand the historical, cultural, and theological implications of Christ's personal address to God as His Father as well as His instruction for His disciples to do the same, the Jewish historical background must be explored.

The primary question to be asked is whether Jesus' approach to God as Abba expressed most clearly in His personal prayers and His teaching to His disciples on prayer was distinct from Old Testament and non-canonical Jewish approaches. An accurate historical and theological understanding of the Jews' relationship with and vision of God in the Old Testament is central to understanding Christ's framework and paradigm for approaching God as Abba Father. If Jesus' relationship with God as Abba and His teaching on the topic represents a noteworthy development in revelation taking place which is congruent with the Old Testament but both unprecedented and unexpected, then this becomes one of the most significant facets of His ministry. However, if Christ merely continued the perspective of the Jewish Scriptures without making a notable development, then His theology of God as Father and use of Abba may not be as theological weighty as some have posited.

For example, highlighting the novelty and significance of Abba language in Jesus' ministry, Jeremias notes that "There is no evidence so far that in Palestinian Judaism of the first



millennium anyone addressed God as ‘my Father.’”<sup>62</sup> If this is true, then Jesus’ repeated address to God as His personal Father and His instruction for His disciples to approach God, in the same manner, represents a historic and theologically substantial addition to a new covenant understanding of God and believer’s intimacy and access to Him. Beyond a personal address of God as Father, Jeremias’ claims are substantiated by his conclusion that, “We can say quite definitely that there is *no analogy at all* in the whole literature of Jewish prayer for God being addressed as Abba.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, to test these claims against the historical, cultural, and theological world of the Old Testament Scriptures, detailed exegesis of key Old Testament texts dealing with God as Father either in direct reference or in metaphor, allegory, or poetic imagery must be performed to reconstruct the worldview and theological perspective of Jesus’ religious ancestors and contemporaries.

What follows in this chapter is an introduction to the Ancient Near Eastern background of their “gods” as fathers in the relevant material from the period and an analysis of the concept of human fatherhood in ancient Israel. The goal is to lay an adequate foundation for the historical, cultural, literary, and theological backgrounds for the biblical-theological survey of the Old Testament’s presentation of God as Father which will be performed in the next chapter. The goal is to study the Old Testament literature informed by the relevant background material to discern if the Old Testament laid a theological foundation and prepared New Testament readers for Christ’s revelation of God Abba. This historical, cultural, literary, and theological study will serve as the basis of this dissertation providing the necessary foundation for the subsequent research.

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<sup>62</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 17.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

## Ancient Near Eastern Backgrounds to Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament

It is a well-known fact that the Old Testament authors lived within the context of the Ancient Near Eastern world and this shared “cognitive environment” has the potential to influence their perception of the world and subsequently their writing.<sup>64</sup> The cultures, customs, worldview, and literary forms of the Old Testament text are impacted by this “cultural river” within which the biblical authors wrote.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the goal of this brief section is to better understand the “cognitive environment” of the ANE to help us more accurately interpret the biblical text that flows in the same ANE “cultural river.” Before addressing specific examples of ANE texts and their relationship with and impact upon the Old Testament revelation of Yahweh as Father, ANE cognitive environment criticism must first be defined to explain the task ahead. Cognitive environment criticism is defined as,

The goal of this discipline is to recover the cultural layers from the world behind the text that were inherently understood by the ancient audience but have been long lost to our modern world. Texts, along with iconography, serve as windows to the cognitive environment of the ancient world.<sup>66</sup>

Walton used an extended metaphor called the “cultural river” which helps to elucidate the meaning and importance of cognitive environment criticism.<sup>67</sup> The modern man lives in the “cultural river” of “personal rights, freedom, capitalism, consumerism, democracy, individualism, globalism, social media, market economy, scientific naturalism, an expanding universe, empiricism, and natural laws.”<sup>68</sup> Whether one agrees with these ideas or not, modern

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<sup>64</sup> Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 333.

<sup>65</sup> John H. Walton, “Understanding Torah: Ancient Legal Text, Covenant Stipulation, and Christian Scripture.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 29, no. 1 (2019): 1.

<sup>66</sup> Greer, Hilber, Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, 333.

<sup>67</sup> Walton, *Understanding Torah*, 1.

<sup>68</sup> Walton, *Understanding Torah*, 1.

culture is thoroughly drenched in these viewpoints and cultural elements and is influenced by these modern cultural ideas. This is the “cognitive environment” in which one lives. The ancient Israelites had their own “cognitive environment” as well, which they shared in large part with their ANE neighbors. Much of their cognitive environment is foreign to the modern cultural river. Their cultural river was marked by “community identity, the comprehensive and ubiquitous agency of the gods, the role of kingship, divination, the centrality of the temple, the mediatory role of images, and the reality of the spirit world and magic.”<sup>69</sup>

To follow Walton’s extended metaphor, while at times Yahweh called Israel to swim against the current of the socially acceptable river of ANE culture (i.e. monotheism, iconoclasm, morality, prohibition of using magic), much of what remains is thoroughly drenched in the ANE cultural river.<sup>70</sup> Walton makes a profound and helpful statement here, “Our default thinking should be to assume that, unless the Bible directs otherwise, Israelite thinking is characterized by strong continuity with what we find in the ancient cultural river.”<sup>71</sup> This makes a significant impact on how the biblical exegete approaches the OT text, the ANE parallels, and subsequently interprets the text.

If Walton is correct and Israel and subsequently the Old Testament Scriptures were written within the same cultural river as their ANE neighbors, then cognitive environment criticism is a necessary task for the biblical exegete. Walton sums up this argument aptly, stating:

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>70</sup> “The Israelites sometimes floated on the currents of that cultural river without resistance, and we would be neither surprised nor critical. At other times, however, the revelation of God encouraged them to struggle out of the current into the shallows, or even to swim furiously upstream. Whatever the extent of the Israelites’ interactions with the cultural river, it is important to remember that they were situated in the ancient cultural river, not immersed in the currents of our modern cultural river.” John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of Torah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 11.

<sup>71</sup> Walton, *Understanding Torah*, 4.

It is this ‘embeddedness’ that we seek to understand so that we may be faithful interpreters of the biblical text. God communicated within the context of their cultural river. God’s message, God’s purposes, and God’s authority were all vested in Israelite communicators for Israelite audiences, and the message took shape according to the internal logic within their language and culture. We cannot be assured of authoritative communication through any other source, and we must therefore find the message of God as communicated through those intermediaries in their ancient cultural river.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, based upon this brief presentation of cognitive environment criticism and the methodological approach above, this section will briefly address the key ANE texts that have a potential impact on the Old Testament’s theological vision of Yahweh as a Father. The goal will be a more accurate and informed interpretation of the biblical material from within the cognitive environment of the ANE.

#### *Comparative Methodology Procedure and Approach Concerning ANE Material*

Before addressing the ANE material itself, it must be discussed that there are several methodologies adopted by scholars in addressing the ANE background materials to the Old Testament. The primary question is, how aware were the writers of Scripture of the ANE writings, thought, and worldview as well as how or if they included this in their writings or were influenced by them?<sup>73</sup> The question of methodology seeks to identify this relationship and influences the biblical exegete in how much interpretive weight is given to these parallels. While there are various approaches to this task,<sup>74</sup> Walton gives an overview of five procedures to approach these ANE parallels. These are: “Borrowing, Polemics, Counter Texts, Echoes, and Diffusions.”<sup>75</sup> A brief analysis of each of these will be provided below.

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<sup>72</sup> Walton and Walton, *The Lost World of Torah*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> Greer, Hilber, Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, 333.

<sup>74</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems,” in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

<sup>75</sup> Greer, Hilber, Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, 333-335.

As its name implies, the borrowing position states that Israel borrowed much of their material from the ANE. Adherents to this view believe that since there is similarity and some of the ANE sources predate the biblical text, there must be direct borrowing by the biblical authors. The polemical position views any use of ANE material by the biblical authors as polemic against the ANE worldview and its “gods.” The counter-texts position is similar to the polemical view yet slightly less strong. Rather than polemicizing the ANE, this approach views the biblical renditions of ANE stories merely as an alternative rendition or viewpoint of the same material. In the echo approach, the Old Testament authors are viewed as making faint and veiled references to the ANE material. The depth of their knowledge and understanding of these materials varies, yet the echo idea remains consistent according to this view. Finally, the position of diffusion claims that the general ideas of the ANE circulated through literature and orally yet were not readily available to Hebrew Scribes or the general population. Rather, they were general cultural norms in the ANE in which Israel lived and thus account for much of the similarity.<sup>76</sup>

Which methodology is to be preferred? Two methodological questions must be asked each time a text is approached before the appropriate method can be chosen. The first is concerning content, how aware and influenced were the writers of Scripture of the ANE writings, thought, and worldview? Was this something they could have known? Did they have access to this material? Or did this idea, custom, or literature function completely separate from Israel? Depending upon their probable knowledge and familiarity of a parallel, the scholar can begin to deduce how much relevance it had upon the specific author of Scripture.<sup>77</sup> The second question is related to intent. Is there any evidence that this specific biblical author referred to, quoted,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Peter C. Craigie, “The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel,” *Tyndale Bulliten* 22 (Jan 1971): 5-9.

echoed, or sought to polemicize a certain ANE writing or concept?<sup>78</sup> There must be some rationale for authorial intent in the parallel lest we be guilty of “parallelomania.”<sup>79</sup> Then, based on the results of these two methodological questions, the best approach for assessing the parallel can be employed.

For this reason, the comparative methodology employed by this study is the necessity of both content and intent by the biblical author to substantiate a legitimate parallel. For an ANE parallel to be proven influential on the exegesis of the biblical text, there must be evidence of a relationship in content and intent between the ANE source and the biblical author. Thus, when comparing the ANE material against the biblical text, these two elements must be present for a substantive parallel to be drawn.

*Theoretical Framework for Describing the Relationship Between the Biblical Text and the Ancient Near Eastern Material*

Using the methodology of content and intent established above, this study concludes that the best approach concerning the theoretical framework between the Old Testament text regarding its ANE parallels is a balanced and nuanced combination of diffusion and polemic by the authors. Why is this distinction to be preferred? When the Bible is compared and contrasted with the ANE material, as will be defended below, “the Bible differs, not merely somewhat but diametrically.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, any position that views the text as a mere “demythization” of the ANE accounts and not as unique nor new is missing the significance of the differences and distinctions between the Bible and the ANE material.<sup>81</sup> The positions of borrowing, counter texts, and mere

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<sup>78</sup> Talmon, “*The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation*,” 83.

<sup>79</sup> Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 18, no. 1 (Mar 1962).

<sup>80</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 80.

<sup>81</sup> John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 33.

echoes do not account for the deeply rooted and systemic differences between materials.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, this study does not affirm that every reference or use of ANE material by the biblical authors is always polemical<sup>83</sup> but that there is much polemical material contained within the Scriptures.<sup>84</sup> That being said, there is also the element of cultural diffusion between the Israelites and their ANE neighbors. They were generally aware of cultures, customs, and practices between their shared cultures and some of the many divergent practices between them because of their shared cultural river or cognitive environment.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the Old Testament authors wrote from within the ANE framework with a balanced and nuanced combination of diffusion and polemic, utilizing the pertinent ANE materials to serve their desired ends. This position roughly resembles Walton's own position. In his own words, Walton describes the biblical author,

He is a protagonist in a conversation, whether engaged in borrowing and reworking, debate (polemic), reflection (counter-text), or casual intertextuality, or simply characterized by general awareness of the way ideas were framed or approached in the ancient world.<sup>86</sup>

What does this mean for our theoretical framework? Using the methodology outlined above, after establishing whether or not the biblical author had knowledge or access to the ANE parallel

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<sup>82</sup> Although this author does not agree with the conclusions made by Delitzsch, even he affirms the widespread differences between the Hebrew Scriptures and the ANE material. See, Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible: Two Lectures Delivered Before the Members of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft in the Presence of the German Emperor* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 136.

<sup>83</sup> For an in-depth exploration of polemical theology, though focused more on New Testament themes, see: Svorad Zavaršký ed., et al., *Themes of Polemical Theology Across Early Modern Literary Genres* (Cambridge: Scholars Publisher, 2016).

<sup>84</sup> Along with Currid's text cited above, there is much material available exploring the polemical nature of the Old Testament contra the ANE. Though dated, one such example is, Robert Henry Pfeiffer, "The Polemic against Idolatry in the Old Testament." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43, no. 3-4 (1924): 229-40.

<sup>85</sup> Greer, Hilber, Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, 334.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

(content), we assess his motivation in using the material (intent).<sup>87</sup> We do this with the basic supposition that generally, the author wrote from a balanced and nuanced combination of diffusion and polemic. This diffusion can be attributed to Israel's place in the same cultural river or cognitive environment as her ANE neighbors. When the parallels are clearer, the most common use is one of polemic using the ANE material for the theological benefit of Israel using the ANE materials to do so in a polemical manner.<sup>88</sup>

### **Analysis of Key Ancient Near Eastern Texts**

With this important foundation having been laid concerning cognitive environment criticism and the methodological approach and perspective of this study, a brief survey of the pertinent ANE material will be provided. The goal is to see where the biblical authors were influenced by cultural diffusion from their religious neighbors, where they actively resisted them through polemic, or where they were simply distinct from them in their understanding of Yahweh as Father. For, as Thompson points out, "The Israelites were not the first or only people to picture their God as a father. Extant texts from ancient Babylon and Egypt picture God as a father because he is the creator of all the earth, the father of the king and, in henotheistic religion, the father of all other gods."<sup>89</sup> The most significant ANE regions to be examined here are those

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<sup>87</sup> Further examples of this will be explored in chapter 3. As each Old Testament text is examined, the relevant ANE parallels or background will be considered in the exegesis.

<sup>88</sup> This is a complex and extensive topic to address. This study can merely scratch the surface of the relationship between the Old Testament and the Ancient Near Eastern world. For a thorough introduction to the issue and helpful texts to begin, see the following: Bill T. Arnold, Nancy L. Erickson and John H. Walton, *Windows to the Ancient World of the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Samuel Greengus* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014); Christopher B. Hays, *Hidden Riches: A Sourcebook for the Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); Victor H. Matthews, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016); Richard A. Freund, *Digging Through the Bible: Understanding Biblical People, Places, and Controversies through Archaeology* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008); John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

<sup>89</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 40.



of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan. As the following survey will demonstrate, these cultures had “a variety of father-figures among their pantheons.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, based on the preceding material, the relevant material must be treated from these cultures and compared and contrasted with that of ancient Israel.<sup>91</sup>

### *Mesopotamia and the Sumerian Literature*

The Sumerians from ancient Mesopotamia are the first recorded peoples to develop ethical, religious, social, political, and philosophical ideas.<sup>92</sup> For the ancient Sumerians, like many of the ANE religions, creation was attributed to a pantheon of gods who were physically active in the procreation of each other, the universe, and humankind. In Sumerian religion, this included the first deity, the “mother” god Nammu from whom come all other gods. These other gods included An, Ki, Enlil, Enki, Nanna, and Utu. Later on, instead of an original goddess mother, there is a version of the Atrahasis Epic from early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE where An or Anu was regarded as the original father, “Anu their father was king,”<sup>93</sup>

A distinct difference that immediately emerges from the ANE material and that of ancient Israel is not only the plurality of deities both male and female but also the explicitly sexual

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<sup>90</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 16.

<sup>91</sup> David Russell Tasker’s study, *The Fatherhood of God: An Exegetical Study From the Hebrew Scriptures*, was invaluable in developing this section. His approach to the ANE literature and his discussion of it in the context of Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament was formative for developing this section. Focusing this discussion on Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan follows his example directly. For a more detailed treatment of this topic and these three relevant ANE cultural religious backgrounds, see Tasker’s study.

<sup>92</sup> Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969). 3; Idem., *From the Poetry' of Sumer: Creation. Glorification. Adoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). 51-52; Idem., *History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-nine Firsts in Man's Recorded History* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1981); Idem., *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1972); Idem., *The Sumerians. Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

<sup>93</sup> Stephanie Dailey. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). 9.

nature of their creation accounts and their physical and sexual involvement in creation. One text will be quoted here for illustration, but this is a concept that is common in the literature of the period, “The holy Earth, the pure Earth, beautified herself for holy Heaven, Heaven, the noble god, inserted his sex into the wide Earth, Let flow the semen of his heroes, Trees and Reed, into her womb, The Earthly Orb, the trusty cow, was impregnated with the good semen of Heaven.”<sup>94</sup> This text is a direct reference to Anu who is called “father.” Immediately the nature of paternity in the ANE world can be seen to stand in stark contrast with the material in the Old Testament text.<sup>95</sup> As Stuart notes,

Many ancient and modern religions are sexually dualistic in their view of deity. They believe that both male and female gods exist, and that many, if not all of them, are paired. In some instances the pairing is a marriage; in others it is what we might call cohabitation-or even an affair. Such dualism is absolutely foreign to the teaching of the Bible. To the dualistic Canaanites, on the other hand, it was illogical to think that their god Baal would be celibate. He had to have a consort, whom we know as Asherah (Judg 3:7; 1 Kgs 18:19).<sup>96</sup>

This point could be illustrated countless times throughout the ANE literature. Suffice it to say, for now, here we have the first “glimpses of the fatherhood of the gods.”<sup>97</sup> Enlil was another deity figure who was called “the father of the gods.”<sup>98</sup> In a liturgy to Enlil, his role as progenitor

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<sup>94</sup> *Disputation Between Tree and Reed*. 5-10; Kramer. *Poetry of Sumer*. 30.

<sup>95</sup> Many of these ANE texts are not only sexual in nature but explicit in their content and description of the deities sexual activity in creation. For one example, see this text about the Sumerian deity Enki: “After he had cast his eye from that spot, After father Enki had lifted it over the Euphrates, He stood up proudly like a rampant bull, He lifts the penis, ejaculates, Filled the Tigris with sparkling water. The wild cow mooing for its young in the pastures, the scorpion (-infested) stall, [The Tigris is surrendered] to him, as (to) a rampant bull. He lifted the penis, brought the bridal gift, Brought joy to the Tigris, like a big wild bull [rejoiced (?)] in its giving birth. The water he brought is sparkling water, its ‘wine’ tastes sweet, The grain he brought, its checkered grain, the people eat it. He filled the Ekur, the house of Enlil, with possessions, With Enki, Enlil rejoices, Nippur [is delighted].” “Enki and the World Order.” in Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 179. Once again, this is only illustration among countless that could be provided.

<sup>96</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2020), 37-38.

<sup>97</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 18.

<sup>98</sup> Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 88.

and creator is celebrated against the sexual imagery of the procreative power of a bull, Enlil, father of the land, bull that overwhelms, thy name is on the lands...”<sup>99</sup> Throughout the Sumerian literature, Enlil is consistently viewed as a paternal figure because he is the progenitor of all things.<sup>100</sup> Two other Sumerian deities addressed as fathers were Nanna and Utu.<sup>101</sup> The same physical relationship between the gods and all humanity is continued in these characters as well. In the Akkadian literature, the same general understanding of the deities as physical progenitors of humankind and a pantheon of gods is reflected in the Gilgamesh Epic, the Atrahasis Epic, and the Enuma Elisha.<sup>102</sup>

In the ANE literature, another distinction with the Hebrew vision of Yahweh as Father is the purpose for the creation of humans. Whereas Yahweh created humankind for friendship, relationship, intimacy, and communion, in Sumerian mythology, the gods created humans to ease their load and do their work for them.<sup>103</sup> That is, the overwhelming perspective of the ANE is that they “Were firmly convinced that man was fashioned for one purpose only: to serve the gods by supplying them with food, drink, and shelter so that they might have their full leisure for their divine activities.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore, even a brief survey of the ANE material demonstrates the

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<sup>99</sup> Stephen Langdon. *Sumerian Liturgies and Psalms*. Publications of the Babylonian Section, vol. 10. no. 4 (Philadelphia: University Museum. University of Pennsylvania. 1919). 292.

<sup>100</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 27.

<sup>101</sup> “Lamentation Over the Destruction of Ur.” in Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 143; Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 74.

<sup>102</sup> For a discussion and survey of this literature, see: Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 41-46.

<sup>103</sup> While this is the prevalent characteristic of the intention of the deities in creating humans to serve their own selfish purpose, there is an interesting text that is the exception, not the norm, for a ANE deity caring for rather than demanding from their followers, “Of the wanderer, of the homeless, Of the homeless, of the wanderer, Utu, you are their mother, you, you are their father, Utu—the orphan, Utu—the widow, Utu, the orphan gazes up to you as his father, Utu, you show favor to the widows like their mother.” BM 23631.29-34. in Kramer. *Poetry of Sumer*. 96.

<sup>104</sup> Samuel Noah Kramer, “Sumerian Theology and Ethics.” *The Harvard Theological Review* 49, no. 1 (1956): 56.

growing consensus that the biblical vision of Yahweh as Father differed diametrically from the religious and cultural environment of the Ancient Near East.

### *Egyptian and Canaanite Literature*

In the plentiful and expansive religious literature of ancient Egypt,<sup>105</sup> there is evidence that at least five deities were referred to as “father,” “Nun (Ptah), Atum (Re or Ra), Shu, Geb, and Osiris.”<sup>106</sup> While the Egyptian literature, religious material, and theology concerning their deities vary widely throughout their history and across the geographic landscape, three primary religiopolitical centers can be identified, Heliopolis, Memphis, and Thebes.<sup>107</sup> The beliefs of Heliopolis are best preserved in the *Pyramid Texts*’ dated to about 2350-2175 B.C.E.<sup>108</sup> As with the Sumerian material, all of the Egyptian texts contain a form of cosmogony, accounting for the origins of all things, a theogony, accounting for the origin and the descent of the deities, or a combination of both.<sup>109</sup> The Egyptian literature also incorporates sexually explicit details concerning the origin of both creation and the deities themselves. After the explanation of his own origin, Atum is titled the “father of gods” for the following sexual act, “Atum is he who

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<sup>105</sup> The goal of this dissertation is not an extensive treatment of the Egyptian or ANE material. Rather, this brief survey is merely meant to provide the necessary background information for accurately interpreting and understanding the biblical text. Thus, for further treatment of the plethora of Egyptian and other ANE material available, see the following works: Glenn S. Holland, *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East* (Lanham,: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2010); Gaston Maspero, *Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005); Richard A. Gabriel, *Gods of Our Fathers: The Memory of Egypt in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2001); Susan Thorpe, *Daily Life in Ancient Egyptian Personal Correspondence* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2021).

<sup>106</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 47.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts: In Translation and Commentary* (New York: Longmans Green. 1952).

<sup>109</sup> Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad. “Ptah. Creator of the Gods: Reconsideration of the Ptah Section of the Denkmal. *Numen* 23. no. 2 (1976): 82.

(once) came into being, who masturbated in On. He took his phallus in his grasp that he might create orgasm by means of it. and so were born the twins Shu and Tefenet.”<sup>110</sup>

This is merely one example that represents the theological outlook of ancient Near Eastern peoples. Against this backdrop, it is not difficult to see how starkly different Israel’s view of Yahweh as Father and His activity in creation contrasts with that of their ANE contemporaries. The origin story of humanity also differs greatly in the Egyptian literature. Rather than being made on purpose for relationship, humans are the accidental result of Atum’s tears. Thus, an interesting point emerges in contrast to the biblical picture. In the ANE, it was believed that both the deities and humans are made from the “bodily fluids of semen, mucous, and tears” which created a physical tie between the deities and humanity.<sup>111</sup> As will be demonstrated in the subsequent survey of the Old Testament, this is a blatantly contrary perspective to that of the biblical authors.

The Egyptians also believed that the Pharaoh was the son of the god Re, born of one of his priests' wives, enabling the Pharaoh to be an actual son of Re.<sup>112</sup> The divine paternity of the Pharaoh and the unique relationship he enjoyed with the deity as his father was a significant theme in ancient Egypt.<sup>113</sup> Perhaps most significant to this present study is that there are occasions where the deities were addressed as “father” in the context of prayer. For example, one Ancient Egyptian text contains the following, “I have come to you, my father, I have come to

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<sup>110</sup> Ut.527.1248. in R. O. Faulkner. *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 1 (Warminster. England: Aris and Phillips. 1973). 198.

<sup>111</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 51.

<sup>112</sup> Pascal Vernus, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt* (New York: John Braziller, 1998), 83.

<sup>113</sup> For an extensive study of this issue throughout Egyptian history, see: Ronald J. Leprohon, *The Great Name: Ancient Egyptian Royal Titulary* (Williston: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

you, O Geb; may you give me your hand, so that I may ascend to the sky to my mother Nut.”<sup>114</sup>

While this is an interesting example, two points must be made. First, this is not an illustration of a living person addressing the deity as such but rather, in the mythology of a deceased Pharaoh gaining entrance into the afterlife. Second, the Pharaoh’s understanding of their literal connection to the gods as their father and their role as a divine is diametrically opposed to that of the Hebrew Scriptures. This point is critical to be understood to see not only the difference between the biblical text and the ANE perspective but also to see the great care with which the biblical authors used to distinguish Yahweh as Father and the ANE and at times utilize polemic to do so. As Tasker so eloquently addresses,

God’s fatherhood is quite unlike the father-gods of the ANE in at least one important regard. Nowhere in the biblical account is there a hint of humans becoming gods, unlike the pharaohs, for example, that became gods on their ascension to the throne. There are a number of places that spell out at length that once a human always a human, as seen in the lengths taken to outline Solomon’s genealogy. God would raise up a ‘son,’ not by His own procreative powers (as seen in the sexual procreative acts of the ANE father-gods), but through David’s act of procreation (2 Sam 7:14). Solomon then became a son by ‘adoption,’ or in other words, his relationship with God is a spiritual, not physical, one, yet profoundly affecting every area of the new king’s life. This forms the pattern for the Father-son relationship with all His children.<sup>115</sup>

This has been a mere surface-level survey of the Egyptian material. Once again, the sheer quantity and complexity of the material and the variations among various religiopolitical centers equates in a wealth of material and perspectives.<sup>116</sup> However, a few points can be made to summarize the Egyptian vision of their deities as father figures. As demonstrated above, there is direct evidence that at times, these deities were understood or called “father” in several contexts.

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<sup>114</sup> Ut.485A. 1030, in Raymond Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 172.

<sup>115</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 233.

<sup>116</sup> A an extremely helpful and beneficial resource to treat and explore each of these topics in greater detail is the following: George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005).

This includes the generation of other gods (theogony), the creation of the world and all things (cosmogony), as a father to the pharaohs, and in helping deceased souls safely pass into the afterlife into the presence of Re.<sup>117</sup>

In Canaan, the Ugaritic literature concerning El and Baal is informative in analyzing the pertinent background information concerning an ANE vision of god(s) as a father.<sup>118</sup>

Interestingly, whereas in the preceding literature surveyed the conception of the deities as father was clear, “The concept of the fatherhood of the gods in the Canaanite pantheon has proved more difficult to unearth.”<sup>119</sup> In the Ugaritic literature, it is El who is referred to as the “father of the gods.”<sup>120</sup> El’s fatherhood is expressed in the following manner. He is seen as creator, progenitor, as bull, as was seen in the Sumerian literature concerning their gods, and finally, as king.<sup>121</sup> Baal is another significant divine figure in the Canaanite religious literature for he is the son of El.<sup>122</sup> As the son of El, while Baal plays a significant role as a deity in Canaan, the imagery of the gods as a father is the least prominent here than in the other ANE material surveyed.<sup>123</sup> However, as with all of the ANE world, the connection between humanity and the

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<sup>117</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 74.

<sup>118</sup> An insightful and useful study that addresses this topic is: John W. Miller, “God as Father in the Bible and the Father Image in several Contemporary Ancient Near Eastern Myths: A Comparison.” *Studies in Religion* 14, no. 3 (1985): 347-354.

<sup>119</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 75.

<sup>120</sup> For access to these ancient texts, see: John C. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2004); James B. Pritchard and Daniel E. Fleming, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>121</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 76-88.

<sup>122</sup> Miller, *God as Father in the Bible and the Father Image in several Contemporary Ancient Near Eastern Myths*, 349.

<sup>123</sup> For further works treating the cultural, historical, literary and religious world and background of the Ancient Near East, see the following: Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Williston: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); C. L. Crouch, Jonathan Stökl, and Anna Elise Zerneck, *Mediating Between Heaven and Earth: Communication with the Divine in the Ancient Near East* (New

shared understanding of the gods as divine parents, “It is not hard to imagine how such an evidently widespread concept of God could have developed. A father was thought of as the procreator, not just of his own immediate children born of his wife or wives, but of the whole family, clan or nation which traces its origins back to him.”<sup>124</sup> Thus, while the least developed or clear, the Canaanites too shared in the cognitive environment of the ANE as owing their existence to the pantheon of gods.<sup>125</sup>

### *Conclusions Concerning the ANE Material*

Having surveyed some of the most significant ANE literature in an attempt to understand the cognitive environment of the ANE from which the Hebrew Scriptures arose, a few major conclusions can be made before addressing the Old Testament text. First, the Old Testament stands in radical contrast to the ANE religious worldview in its steadfast presentation of monotheism against the pantheism of the ANE. Yahweh is the sole creator and deity of His people. This could not be in more discontinuity with the shared perspectives of the peoples of the ANE. The biblical text lacks all elements of theogony, a pantheon of gods, divine competition, and all of the polytheistic elements of Israel’s contemporaries. Thus, in every instance, Yahweh’s role as the sole deity for Israel is both a distinct and a polemical charge against the pantheism of false gods revered by the ANE world.<sup>126</sup>

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York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2014); Anne Porter and Glenn M. Schwarz, *Sacred Killing: The Archaeology of Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); Eric M. Trink, *Cultures of Mobility, Migration, and Religion in Ancient Israel and Its World* (London: Routledge, 2022); Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, Ca. 3000-323 BC*. (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2015); Louis Lawrence Orlin, *Life and Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

<sup>124</sup> Mason, *Old Testament Pictures of God*, 55.

<sup>125</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 76.

<sup>126</sup> For example, “The dualistic magical practices of the Canaanites, such as ‘marrying’ seed sown in fields in an effort to increase crop yields, or ‘marrying’ cloth in clothing in an effort to stimulate the fertility of flax or sheep (Lev 19:19), or boiling a male goat kid in his mother’s milk (Exod 23.T7) were strictly outlawed, as was



A second significant distinction between the Old Testament and the ANE literature is that the biblical material has an obvious lack of sexually explicit content in its presentation of the creation of the universe. There is absolutely no trace of any kind of physical involvement by Yahweh or sexual activity in the creation of the cosmos or of humankind. That is, since Yahweh is the creator, “The Scriptural perspective still contains the idea of God ’s fatherhood at Creation, but portrays it to be of a different nature, showing more of a parental concern for offspring rather than genetically linking divinity to the created realm.”<sup>127</sup> This will be demonstrated clearly in the subsequent exegesis of the Old Testament texts related to Yahweh as Father. Third, and related to the preceding point, Yahweh’s paternity is based upon covenant and election of Israel and not physical procreation or literal begetting of them as His children:

The nature of the Father-child relationship that God enjoys with humans is one based on covenant, and rules out any correspondence with the ANE notion of father-god progenitorship. The covenant motif is seen when God establishes the people at the Exodus, divides the inheritance of the nations (Deut 32:8-9, echoing Gen 10), finds them in the desert (vs. 10), leads them (vs. 12), and causes them to ride on the heights (vs. 13). Covenant is also seen with the promise of a perpetual Davidic dynasty.<sup>128</sup>

As the subsequent exegesis will illustrate, the Old Testament authors are relentless in their connection of Yahweh’s role as Father to his covenant with Israel and His election and adoption of them through deliverance from Egypt. This is perhaps another example of the polemical nature of the Old Testament or at the very least, a conscious and concerted effort by Yahweh Himself and the biblical authors to distinguish Yahweh from any conception of ANE parallels.

A fourth distinction that was addressed above is that the ANE purpose and explanation for the creation of humanity could not be more dissimilar from the biblical portrait. In the Old

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ritual sex in worship, also essentially dualistic. The worship of any god other than Yahweh was forbidden, and this certainly included the worship of a goddess (cf. Exod 34:13; Deut 12:3).” Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 37-38.

<sup>127</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 254.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

Testament humans are the treasured, prized, and crown jewel of Yahweh's creation made in His very own image (Genesis 1:27). In the ANE world, humankind is either the accidental result of the gods' activity or created as a low-class source of labor and relief of the gods. Thus, the Hebrew religion gave meaning, purpose, and dignity to every human life whereas the ANE drew a significant distinction between the gods and the subservient role of humans. Finally, this point itself addressed the radical discontinuity between the character of Yahweh as Father against the malicious, sexually deviant, and combative nature of the ANE gods. As Martin argues, the Israelite conception of Yahweh as a Father could not have been borrowed from the ANE pantheon of gods for in those religions, the image of "father god" was "brutish, incompetent, ineffective, and generally inert."<sup>129</sup> This stands in stark contrast for, "The source of Israel's belief in God as the Father of his people was their theological reflection on the mystery of God's choice of Israel, expressed in his action by which they were rescued from slavery and given a land."<sup>130</sup>

To conclude this section on the ANE background of the Old Testament and Israel's relationship with their cultural and religious neighbors, it is still maintained as the subsequent exegesis will demonstrate that the Old Testament authors reflect a balanced and nuanced combination of diffusion and polemic by the authors. The biblical text did come from the cultural cognitive environment of the ANE. However, the biblical authors were not unaware of this. Rather, they demonstrate either a conscious rejection of the religious perspectives of their time or a full-blown polemic against the religious views of the time.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, when father language

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<sup>129</sup> Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 271.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> While this is true of the biblical authors, it is not always indicative of Israel as a whole. As Stuart notes, there is evidence from within Israel itself of cultural and religious syncretism. However, this is not so for the biblical text and the biblical authors were aware of this and actively condemning and addressing it: "Since most of the Israelites during most of their history were not orthodox followers of the revealed truth, but apostatized idolaters, it

is employed by Israel's ANE contemporaries, the meaning and significance behind the imagery is radically different. This perceptive will now be tested against the Old Testament text and the findings of this survey of ANE material will be incorporated into the subsequent exegesis.

### **Concept of Divine Fatherhood In Ancient Israel**

Before surveying the Old Testament text and each of its individual references to Yahweh as Father, a brief attempt must be made in attempting to reconstruct the Jewish understanding of fatherhood outside of these religious contexts. That is, just as the ANE material informed the cultural and religious milieu of the period, even more significant is the historical and cultural understanding of father that can be formed from the pertinent Jewish material. A historical, cultural, and religious understanding of what came to mind when the biblical authors appealed to fatherhood imagery for Yahweh is significant for, "When referring to God Yahweh, the term 'father' was primarily an element of a biblical image or figurative, and only exceptionally it served as a title or invocation, usually in the collective cry 'Our Father.'"<sup>132</sup> Thus, the historical and cultural place of the father within the Jewish family and society formed the theological backdrop for the religious texts employing this kind of imagery.<sup>133</sup>

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is reasonable to imagine that at least some of them would corrupt the worship of Yahweh in the style of dualistic Canaanite religion, and begin to believe that Yahweh ought to have a goddess consort, too. This did, indeed, happen (cf. Deut 16:21; 2 Kgs 23:6). Extrabiblically, inscriptions and paintings found at the Sinai wilderness shrine of Kuntillet A jrud prove that some Israelites from about the time of Hosea worshiped "Yahweh and his Asherah." That is, they simply borrowed Baal's goddess girlfriend and gave her also to Yahweh. It wasn't orthodox, but neither were they. It was dualistic, forbidden by the Mosaic Law, but believed and practiced nevertheless." Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2020), 37-38.

<sup>132</sup> Stefan Szymik, "Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba: Its Sources and Impact on the Idea of the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament," *Verbum Vitae* 38, no. 2 (2020): 488.

<sup>133</sup> For further research and discussion on this topic, see the following works: Felix Albrecht and Reinhard Feldmeier, *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity* (Boston: BRILL, 2014); Puech, Émile. "Dieu Le Père Dans Les Écrits Pérítamentaires Et Les Manuscrits De La Mer Morte." *Revue De Qumrân* 20, No. 2 (78) (2001): 287-310; Peter Widdicombe, "Fatherhood and the Conception of God in Early Greek Christian Literature." *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 3 (Summer, 2000): 519-36.

The biblical text itself which will be surveyed will be the most informative and pertinent background material. However, a few brief comments and assertions will be made in preparation for the exegetical analysis which will ensue. There are three primary underlying ideas behind the Jewish conception of Yahweh as Father. First, “The father is the source or origin of a family or clan, who as the founding father provides an inheritance to his children.”<sup>134</sup> This is one of the clearest implications behind the imagery of fatherhood. An example of this is Proverbs 23:22 where the author refers to the role of a father as the one “Who gave you life.” Just as an earthly father is involved in the physical procreation of His child, so too Yahweh will be likened to a Father as the ultimate source behind the formation and creation of His people. As will be demonstrated through the subsequent exegesis, Yahweh is demonstrated explicitly to be the creator not just of Israel but of the entire cosmos and all that exists (Genesis 1-2). At the same time, the biblical authors are incredibly careful not to mix Yahweh’s role as creator with the metaphorical imagery of Him as Father in any way that could be confused with the ANE cultural and religious landscape around them. This is significant for,

While some passages of the Old Testament speak of God’s ‘begetting’ in connection with the creation of all peoples (cf. Isa. 45:9–13), in general the ‘fatherhood of God’ refers neither to God as universal creator nor to some attribute or quality of God. It refers specifically to God’s purposes and blessings for Israel (Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:19; 31:9). This is where Israelite faith takes a turn from its neighbors. While it speaks of the one God, creator of all that is, as Father, it limits that Fatherhood particularly to the people of Israel.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, the biblical authors exercise great precision in their references to Yahweh as Father to distinguish between His covenant relationship with Israel and His creation of them through

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<sup>134</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 39.

<sup>135</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 41.

election and rescue from Egypt and His general role as creator of all people (Jer. 31:9; Deut. 32:4—6; cf. Deut. 32:18).<sup>136</sup>

A second element of Yahweh as Father that emerges from this metaphorical imagery is that just as a father cares for, protects, and provides for His children, so too does Yahweh for His children.<sup>137</sup> This is another foundational concept behind the biblical imagery of Yahweh as a Father and its connection to human fatherhood. Every Jew before and during the Old Testament period understood the natural father's role in caring for his family no matter the cost to himself, providing for them whatever needed, and protecting them against any attack, danger, or threat. This idyllic role of the natural father in the family is what the biblical authors appeal to when revealing Yahweh's nature as Israel's Father, That is, "The biblical depiction of God as Father refers to the image of an Israelite family, which was close to the inspired authors, in which the father had a special place as their parent, provider and educator, but also their guardian and protector."<sup>138</sup>

A few examples of this will be provided here to illustrate this point as a significant theological element of the Scriptures' address of Yahweh as Father. For example, the Psalmist compared the compassion of a natural father to Yahweh's care and compassion for His children (Psalm 103:13) Interestingly, as has already been noted and will continue to be addressed, the relationship between Yahweh's role as Father not through procreation but through covenant against the ANE framework appears. What is clear is that the imagery of the father in Israelite

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<sup>136</sup> Rex Mason, *Old Testament Pictures of God* (Oxford: Smyth and Helwys, 1993), 52–56.

<sup>137</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament*, 39.

<sup>138</sup> Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba*, 488.

society is one that was connected to tenderness and compassion. This is illustrated beautifully in one of the Scriptures' earliest references to Yahweh as a Father:

The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place. (Deuteronomy 1:30-31 ESV)

This example stands out as a stunning picture of Yahweh's faithful love and commitment to Israel in not merely rescuing them from Egypt but in carrying them Himself like a father carries a son. Every Jew would have either seen or experienced first-hand the intimate experience of carrying their own son in their bosom. It is this experience that the biblical author appeals to in the revelation of both Yahweh's love and demonstrable paternal care for His people as their Father. The father's role in Israelite society consisted not only in practical care for his children but also in spiritual leadership and instruction (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). This teaching role and responsibility for the instruction of the child in Hebrew culture is summarized in the famous adage, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6 ESV). Another element of the Hebrew father's responsibility in caring for his children was to not only bring them into this world or care for them during his lifetime but to wisely, carefully, and graciously leave them an inheritance, "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous." (Proverbs 13:22 ESV). This was mentioned in the first role of a father in Israelite society above and plays a significant role in the biblical text.

While this section is focused on the Old Testament, a brief statement about the New Testament and the place of Jewish fathers during this period must be made here, especially regarding the father's role in caring for and providing for his children. Jesus' teaching concerning God as Father stands at a significant place in revelation history at the close of the Old

Covenant and the commencement period of the new. At the same time, the familial culture and values during Jesus' time were essentially the same as His Israelite predecessors and thus reveal the continuity between the Old and New Testament imagery concerning God as Father. That is,

The Gospels depict Jesus' speaking of a new family gathered about him, a family that honors the Father and does his will. Jesus promises that the heavenly Father will provide for his children as a father provides bread for his children. And Jesus speaks of the kingdom as an inheritance that God gives to them. This tapestry is woven with threads that come from the pages of the Old Testament, and reappear in Jewish literature contemporary with Jesus.<sup>139</sup>

Detailed exegesis of pertinent New Testament texts will be reserved for later. For now, two brief references will be made that provide significant insight into understanding the Jewish role of the father in the family. In Mathew 7:7-11 and Luke 11:9-13, Jesus appeals to the gracious and generous nature of Hebrew fathers, even those whom He considers "evil" in contrast to the Heavenly Father's surpassing generosity. In both instances, it is the natural father's proclivity to provide for his child's needs and care for them that undergirds the Christian's confidence, trust, and boldness in approaching their Heavenly Father. It is within the practical context of a child requesting bread, a fish, or an egg, and the father's generosity to provide whatever is needed that Christ invited His disciples to pray. The implications and details of this will be discussed later on. For now, what is important to note is that in both the Old and New Testaments, there is continuity in that one of the chief responsibilities of a Hebrew father was to care for, provide for, and protect his children. This has significant theological significance for the subsequent exegesis of every text that appeals to Yahweh as a Father. Latent within the imagery is a loving father who cares for the needs of His children.

The final major idea behind the Jewish conception of Yahweh as Father is that "Obedience and honor are due to the father, and, hence, when children disobey or go astray, they

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<sup>139</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 54-55.

are corrected or disciplined.”<sup>140</sup> It is difficult to stress how essential this concept was in Hebrew culture and the exegetical impact it has upon all subsequent treatment of the biblical text. One of the ten commandments which became the bedrock of Hebrew culture and religion commanded the honor and obedience of children to their fathers, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12 ESV) This command was reiterated in Leviticus 19:3, Deuteronomy 5:16, and reaffirmed by Jesus as the very words of God in Matthew 15:4. Thus, honor due a father is one of the clearest underlying concepts behind biblical usage of paternal language for Yahweh. To feel the weight and gravity of this command in Israelite society, a passage will be quoted from Deuteronomy 21:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear. (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

Adherence to both honor and obey one’s father in Israelite culture was a matter of life and death. In Leviticus 21, if someone struck (21:15) or cursed (21:17) his father or mother, he also was to be put to death. Within Israelite society, the severity of disobedience and dishonor to one’s parent is difficult to overemphasize (Proverbs 20:20). Therefore, the repeated demand throughout the Old Testament to both honor and obey Yahweh as Israel’s covenant Father was not a metaphorical concept lacking a clear antecedent. When the biblical authors appealed to Yahweh’s role as Father as the impetus for honor and obedience for Israel, it was this sobering background of Jewish law toward natural parents that informed this imagery.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 54-55.

<sup>141</sup> The nature of fatherhood and familial relationships in the Ancient Near East is a complex one. For a historical, theological, and religious introduction to this topic see the following works: John H. Walton, *Ancient*



This theme of honor and obedience to Yahweh is central in the Old Testament. This is true in each instance where Yahweh is directly addressed or referenced as Father. In addition to this, in the plethora of occurrences where Israel is called to either honor or obey Yahweh, in these places too, it is Yahweh's role not only as their covenant God but also as their loving Father which undergirds these commands. This relationship between Yahweh's identity as both Lord and Father tempers the exegesis and approach to texts concerning honor and obedience. For the ancient Jewish family, "The father is the center of gravity in the family."<sup>142</sup> Thus, He deserves to be honored, revered, and obeyed.

At the same time, as has been discussed, the Father also has an intimate relationship with his children and loves to care for, provide for, and protect them. The Father's strength is tempered by his tender love and care for His child. The Hebrew child is commanded to honor and obey his father, but this honor and obedience was never intended to be sheer duty or demanded by strict regulation. Rather, the child was to willingly and gladly respond to the father's leadership and authority with honor and obedience from a heart of love, thankfulness, and gratitude. Malachi 1:6 is a clear example of this where the Lord Himself ties these ideas together, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?" (Malachi 1:6 ESV). This text will be addressed later on in this study. For now, the point is to illustrate that just as the culture of fatherhood in Israelite society consisted of honor and obedience based upon the Jewish Law but also the

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*Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Carol L. Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 1 (2014): 8–27; I. Mendelsohn, "The Family in the Ancient Near East." *The Biblical Archaeologist* 11, no. 2 (1948): 24–40.

<sup>142</sup> I. Mendelsohn, "The Family in the Ancient Near East." *The Biblical Archaeologist* 11, no. 2 (1948): 40.

father's role as both authority and loving care and protection in the family unit, this imagery also looms behind references to Yahweh as Father.

Scriptural examples of this concept abound throughout the Old Testament text. One further example among many is the connection between honor and obedience to Yahweh and His desire that it come from a willing heart of "joyfulness and gladness of heart:" "...You did not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you... You did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things..." (Deuteronomy 28:45-47 ESV) This text illustrates that as Father, Yahweh not only desires the rote obedience of His people but as a Father desires willing and joyful obedience from his children, Yahweh desires the same from Israel.

The necessary implication of this as illustrated above is that in a Hebrew family where the father is commanded to be honored and obeyed, if this is not heeded by the children, the father's role is to correct and discipline the child. The biblical author ties the natural role of a father as the primary disciplinarian in a family with the imagery of Yahweh as a Father who does the same, "Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you." (Deuteronomy 8:5 ESV) Once again, it is the role of the Father within Israelite society that forms the cultural and theological foundation for this imagery applied to Yahweh. When Yahweh is addressed as father and when His discipline or correction is in view, it is the underlying conception of the Hebrew father's responsibility to do the same that informs the metaphor.<sup>143</sup>

The book of Proverbs provides one of the most extensive and clear demonstrations of the relationship between the idea of honor and obedience and the call for discipline, reproof,

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<sup>143</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 39.

correction, and rebuke of the disobedient and dishonoring child. Throughout the book of Proverbs, children are repeatedly called to listen to and obey their parents as the application of the command to honor them from the Torah, “My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching.” (Proverbs 6:20 ESV)<sup>144</sup> In addition to this, fathers are instructed directly to discipline and correct their children, “Discipline your son, for there is hope,” (Proverbs 19:18 ESV).<sup>145</sup> The correlation between honor and obedience due to a father, a child’s instruction to do so, and the father’s responsibility to correct and discipline the child when this command was not heeded formed the backbone of Hebrew family life.

It is this core tenet of the familial structure that enriches and illuminates the biblical imagery of Yahweh as Israel’s father. Proverbs 3:11-12 is a key text that ties each of these concepts together and illustrates their relationship to Yahweh as Father, “My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:11-12 ESV). Here, attention is drawn to the reality that an earthly father disciplines and reproves the son “in whom he delights.” For this reason, pious Jews should respond to Yahweh’s correction and reproof knowing that He does so as a father who delights in His children. The demand for honor and obedience is once again placed within the context of Yahweh’s tender love, care, and compassion for His people as His own children. This tie between Yahweh’s love and His responsibility to correct and discipline as Father is present even in the context of the Davidic kingship who enjoyed the elevated status as the very “sons” of Yahweh, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,

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<sup>144</sup> Other examples include Proverbs 15:5, 23:19, and 13:1.

<sup>145</sup> Other instances of this include Proverbs 22:15 and 29:15.

but my steadfast love will not depart from him..." (2 Samuel 7:14-15 ESV).<sup>146</sup> Therefore, the honor and obedience due to fathers demands their role of discipline and correction in the lives of children. If this is true of human and earthly fathers, how much more so for Yahweh, the Father of Israel? Thus, honor and obedience are one of the central components of understanding fatherhood in ancient Israel, and the imagery of this when applied to Yahweh,<sup>147</sup>

### **Conclusion: Summary of Divine Fatherhood In Ancient Israel**

In summary, there are three primary underlying concepts behind the role of the father in Ancient Israel.<sup>148</sup> The first is that the Jewish father was understood as the source, origin, and founder of the family. As the source of life for the individual and the family line, the father was responsible for leaving an inheritance to his children.<sup>149</sup> Second, in an appeal to one of the clearest elements of human fatherhood, fathers in Israel were tasked with caring for, providing for, and protecting their children. Finally, fathers were to be honored, revered, and obeyed by their children. The punishment according to mosaic Law was severe if this command was not heeded and therefore children were commanded to honor and obey their fathers and fathers were instructed to train, rebuke, and correct their children. These three major aspects of a Jewish

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<sup>146</sup> David Russell Tasker, "The Fatherhood of God: an Exegetical Study From the Hebrew Scriptures," (2001). *Dissertations*. 152., 257.

<sup>147</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 39.

<sup>148</sup> Two works that were formative in developing this tripart understanding of fatherhood in ancient Israel and its implications for theological texts related to Yahweh are: Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); David Russell Tasker, "The Fatherhood of God: an Exegetical Study From the Hebrew Scriptures" (2001). *Dissertations*. 152.

<sup>149</sup> A fascinating example of honor and obedience to a father figure who serves as the source and origin of a family in the Old Testament is that of the Rechabites in Jeremiah 35:1-11. While this topic falls outside the scope of this dissertation, see the following resources for more information: Chris H. Knights, "The Rechabites Revisited: The History of the Rechabites Twenty-Five Years On." *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 23(4), 2014, 307-320; Chris Knights, "Rechabites Ancient and Modern: A Study in the Use of Scripture." *The Expository Times*, 113(10), 2002, 333-337; Chris Knights, "Who were the Rechabites?" *The Expository Times*, 107(5), 1996, 137-140; Ronit Nikolsky, "The History of the Rechabites and the Jeremiah Literature." *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 13, no. 2 (October 2002): 185-207.

conception of the father are present from the Old Testament period all the way through Second Temple Judaism and into the New Testament era. For, “In the biblical and intertestamental books the term ‘father’ was understood in quite patriarchal terms, that is, as the begetter but also the chief provider, teacher, disciplinarian, owner, and judge, etc.”<sup>150</sup> These three major historical and cultural elements of ancient Israelite fatherhood must be incorporated into all subsequent exegesis of the biblical text and are significant in forming the Jewish conception of fatherhood.

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<sup>150</sup> Carey A. Moore, *Tobit: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1996), 275–287.

## **Chapter 3: Old Testament Theology of God as Father**

### **Introduction: Old Testament Theology of God as Father**

The previous chapter provided a robust introduction to the Ancient Near Eastern background of their “gods” as fathers in the relevant material from the period and an analysis of the concept of human fatherhood in ancient Israel. The goal was to lay an adequate foundation for the historical, cultural, literary, and theological backgrounds for the biblical-theological presentation of the Old Testament’s presentation of God as Father which will be performed in this chapter. Special attention will be given throughout this exegetical analysis of the diverse yet unified witness of the Old Testament to linguistic analysis of key terms and language employed for Yahweh by the biblical authors. The goal of this chapter is to examine the Old Testament literature informed by the relevant background material to continue to discern if the Old Testament laid a theological foundation and prepared New Testament readers for Christ’s revelation of God as Abba. The combined historical, cultural, literary, and theological material from the present, preceding, and subsequent chapters will serve as the foundation of this dissertation providing the necessary foundation for the following research concerning Christ’s usage of Abba Father for Yahweh.

### **Exegetical Analysis of Key Old Testament Texts**

There are at least fifteen direct references in the Old Testament to God as Father.<sup>151</sup> This forms the basis for the Old Testament’s presentation of God as Father which is the foundation for Jesus’ development of this theme. There are a few significant comments to be made before addressing the Old Testament text. First, unlike the New Testament, in each of the fifteen Old Testament direct references to God as Father, “the relationship is always between God and

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<sup>151</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 12.

Israel”<sup>152</sup> rather than between God and individual Israelites. The only potential exception to this which will be discussed is perhaps the king’s unique relation to God as His Father yet even this does not match the New Testament’s presentation of God as each believer’s personal Father.<sup>153</sup> Second, as will also be treated further, Israel’s view of God as Father differed notably from their Ancient Near Eastern religious contemporaries. This too is important for one must not impose foreign ideas and concepts from the Ancient Near Eastern worldview of Israel’s neighbors into the biblical references to God as Israel’s Father. Finally, these Old Testament texts are not only meaningful in establishing New Testament backgrounds but also for providing the historical and theological framework for the non-canonical Jewish material including Palestinian Jewish literature, the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, and 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century Jewish writings. These three points should be considered and kept in mind as the Old Testament text is now explored.

### *Deuteronomy*

The first direct reference to God as Father in the Old Testament is in Deuteronomy 32:6 appearing in the Song of Moses:<sup>154</sup> “Do you thus repay the Lord, you foolish and senseless people? *Is not he your father*, who created you, who made you and established you?” The song of Moses plays an important role in Israel’s history. As Craigie and Harrison note,

The song functions as a part of the witness to the renewal of the covenant; when the Israelites sang it, they would bear witness to their understanding and agreement to the full terms and implications of the covenant... In this context, the song was not only a song of witness for the present, but one that would continue to be sung in the future, thus bearing a continuing witness of the covenant commitment and reminding the people of the implications of a breach of the covenant.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 21.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Peter C. Craigie and Ronald Kenneth Harrison, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 28.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

Thus, the theological implications of Moses' assertion that Yahweh is Israel's Father who created (אֱלֹהֵינוּ), made (אֱלֹהֵינוּ), and established (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) Israel reach far beyond the context of Deuteronomy and impact all of Israel's subsequent history and theology of God as their Father. Yahweh's call for covenant fidelity was not "Onerous impositions, but a reflection of God's covenant love."<sup>156</sup>

The two most significant concepts for understanding God as Father according to the Old Testament emerge in this text and are latent with all subsequent usage throughout the biblical text. First, Yahweh is presented as the Father of Israel corporately, not as the Father individually of every believer as in the New Testament. This concept will continue to be discussed at length as the Old Testament references to God as Father are analyzed. The children of Israel collectively are Fathered by God and while they are each His sons and daughters, their relationship to Him is corporate and communal.

Second, the nature of Yahweh's paternity to Israel is categorically distinct from their Ancient Near Eastern religious contemporaries.<sup>157</sup> As Jeremias notes, "The Old Testament reflects the ancient oriental concept of divine fatherhood. Still, there are fundamental differences. Not the least of them is that in the Old Testament, God the Father and Creator is not thought of as ancestor or progenitor."<sup>158</sup> Deuteronomy 32:6 is a key text that begins to establish this theological distinction between Yahweh as Father in contrast to pagan notions of the same

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<sup>156</sup> Craigie and Harrison, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 28.

<sup>157</sup> This is an example of what was argued in the previous chapter. The biblical authors appear to be aware of the worldview and religious beliefs of their ANE neighbors. Thus, in their presentation of Yahweh as Father, they employ a balanced and nuanced combination of diffusion and polemic. They were aware of the religious cognitive environment of the ANE and consciously rejected it in their presentation of Yahweh as Father in drawing clear distinction between the nature of His paternity against the pagan idea of this in relation to their gods. This affirms Walton's position as well which was presented in the previous chapter. Greer, Hilber, Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, 334.

<sup>158</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 12.



concept. For example, Moses is strategic in his choice of verb to connect Yahweh's paternity with the historical election, rescue, and redemption of Israel as His sons and daughters:

The verb translated by 'create' is *qānāh*, not the more familiar *bārā* which is employed in Gen. 1:1. The same verb (*qānāh*) is used in Exod. 15:16 in the song celebrating the Exodus from Egypt. Thus the phrase he created you, in its context, alludes to both the Exodus and Sinai as the events connected with the 'creation' of the people of the Lord. That 'creation' was initiated in the grace and covenant love of the Lord, and for Israel to forget that grace and to act perversely was tantamount to forgetting its very *raison d'être*.<sup>159</sup>

This is significant both in laying the theological foundation for Israel's understanding of Yahweh as their Father as well as clearly distinguishing between Jewish beliefs and those of their religious neighbors. Jeremias' comments here are insightful in drawing attention to the nature of Yahweh as Israel's father and the novelty of this against the ANE background:

The decisively new factor here is that the election of Israel as God's first-born has been made manifest in a historical action, the Exodus from Egypt. Combining God's fatherhood with a historical action involves a profound revision of the concept of God as Father. The certainty that God is Father and Israel his son is grounded not in mythology but in a unique act of salvation by God, which Israel had experienced in history.<sup>160</sup>

These two points will be tested throughout the Old Testament as every instance of God as Father is analyzed in direct contrast to the ANE perspective of god(s) as their father. As Smail points out, the Hebrew understanding of Yahweh as Father was distinct from the religious views of the period and has significant implications for Jesus' development of this theme, "The Old Testament begins to define God's fatherhood in a way that is in deliberate and fundamental contradiction with the pagan notions of divine paternity. Jesus' use of Abba has all that behind it and can be understood only in relation to it."<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Craigie and Harrison, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 28c.

<sup>160</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 13.

<sup>161</sup> Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 36.

Therefore, to summarize,

It is not in the context of creation and natural relationship but in that of historical election and final redemption that the father/son relationship between God and his people is hesitantly allowed to come to reserved expression within the Old Testament. When the notions of Father and Creator are uncharacteristically brought together in the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32.6 the thought is of his freedom and authority as Creator which claims his people's obedience rather than of any natural bond between them.<sup>162</sup>

This means that Israel's sonship is not due to pagan notions of Yahweh as their physical father but rather that the election and adoption of Israel through their historical rescue and redemption is what makes Yahweh their Father. This makes the Old Testament's perspective unique from its ANE counterparts and foundational for tracing the development of this Old Testament concept throughout Israel's history until its climax in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus.<sup>163</sup>

### *Isaiah*

Isaiah the prophet reflects the same approach to the nature and meaning of God as the Father of Israel as that which was established in Deuteronomy. Three times in two different places Isaiah refers to Yahweh as Israel's Father. The first two of these references are in Isaiah 63:16: "For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name." (Isaiah 63:16 ESV)

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<sup>162</sup> Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 36.

<sup>163</sup> For a variety of other commentaries and technical works that address this text, see: J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Leicester: Downers Grove: 2002); Edward J. Woods and J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011); Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Webster, Evangelical Press, 2006); Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: [Devarim]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996); Daniel Isaac Block, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

Verses 15 and 16 open the “lament proper”<sup>164</sup> as the author looks back at the Lord’s faithfulness in the past and His covenant fidelity and loyalty to His people, their current state of suffering, and appeals to Yahweh’s mercy and kindness as Israel’s Father as the basis for his prayer.<sup>165</sup> The prophet’s hope that Yahweh will surely respond to his prayer and rescue His people is in his understanding that Yahweh is Israel’s Father. Concerning this specific reference, Motyer writes, “The reference to Abraham and Israel is enclosed in references to the Lord as Father and Redeemer, and the sense of the verse is that where even the greatest and most honoured members of the family can offer no help, the fatherhood of the Lord and his Redeemer-kinship still available and avails.”<sup>166</sup> Thus, the prophet’s trust and confidence that Yahweh will respond and answer His people is found in the reality that Israel understood that they were sons and daughters of Yahweh for He was their Father.

Three significant points emerge here that are in continuation of the theology expressed by Moses concerning Yahweh as Israel’s Father. First, just as in Deuteronomy, in contrast to pagan notions of literal physical paternal deity, Isaiah links the Fatherhood of Yahweh to the historical events of His rescue and adoption of Israel. It is a common thread throughout the Old Testament text regarding Yahweh as Father that it is tied directly to His rescue and adoption of Israel.

Oswalt comments on this, writing,

But what is the basis for such expectations that God should care about us? By what right does the prophet expect that God should have feelings of affection and compassion toward us? The answer goes back to the election of the people of God (v. 8). Who brought these ‘children’ into existence? It was not Abraham or Israel (Jacob). These men are not the real ‘fathers’ of the people of God. It is God who fathered these people (cf.

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<sup>164</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 38.

<sup>165</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction Commentary* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 860.

<sup>166</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 860.

64:7 [Eng. 8; Deut. 32:6). This is a profound thought: Israel is not an ethnic, or linguistic, or national entity, but a spiritual one. God is their Father.<sup>167</sup>

Thus, this is a significant element of the Old Testament's theology of Yahweh as Father that spans Israel's history.

A second significant point shared with Deuteronomy and one that will be demonstrated time and time again throughout the Old Testament is that Yahweh is the Father of Israel plural, not in an individual sense as will be developed and presented by the Lord Jesus. In the Jewish perspective, God had elected, rescued, and adopted Israel as a people and they together were the children of Yahweh. Isaiah reflects and continues this theological view. Finally, a significant point to be made is that Isaiah's reference to Yahweh as Israel's Father is a general appeal that he assumes Israel would have understood. He does not defend or explain Yahweh as the Father of Israel. Rather, he merely appeals to a point that he knew Israel would have identified with and understood the significance of. As Oswalt points out, "God's relations with his own are deeper than the deepest we humans know, that between a parent and a child. Although Abraham might deny his children, God cannot. This is why the prophet is so bold as to call on God to do what he should."<sup>168</sup> Therefore, Isaiah calls on the mercy and kindness of Yahweh as Israel's Father rooted in the reality of His historical election, rescue, and adoption of His people. Isaiah appealed to a common view of God as the Father of all of Israel with the assumption that his audience would have understood this nature of Yahweh's personhood and character.

Isaiah's other usage of Father for God is similar to those already examined while also introducing another nuance into the Old Testament's portrait of Yahweh as Father. Isaiah 64:8 reads as follows: "But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter;

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<sup>167</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 38.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

we are all the work of your hand” (Isaiah 64:8 ESV). This is the final section of Isaiah’s lament started in chapter 63. Isaiah is making a “plaintive call for God to remember two things: he is the one who brought Israel into existence, and they are now in misery and shame”<sup>169</sup> It is in this context of lament and calling upon Yahweh to remember His people that Isaiah once again employs Fatherhood language and imagery for the Lord. In congruence with his earlier usage, Isaiah appeals to Yahweh as the one who had called and created Israel and therefore, even in the midst of their sin, would Yahweh once again show mercy to his children. As Motyer so eloquently summarizes,

There is another side to the changelessness of God. On the one hand, he is changeless in his requirements (4– 5), on the other, he is equally changeless in grace and mercy. Once he has constituted himself the Father (63:16) of his people that too is unalterable. So the present stanza moves from the grim admissions of verses 6-7 to plead *you are our Father* (8a) and *we are all your people* (9d) making these the basis of prayer that anger may cease (9a), iniquity be forgotten (9b), and favorable attention return (9c).<sup>170</sup>

Thus, a theme emerges in Isaiah as well as in the reference from Deuteronomy that based upon Yahweh’s covenant love and calling of His people, they grew to depend on Him and view him as their Father. Yahweh had bound Himself to His people through His love and even in the midst of suffering and abandonment, the prophet’s hope was that the compassion of Yahweh as Father would be stirred. It was Yahweh who brought Israel into existence as His children and therefore, they could be confident that He would once again come to their rescue. In context, Isaiah’s appeal is made upon the reality that,

Israel is the distinct creation of God. This was a central point of the historical reminiscence of 63:7-14: God did not call Israel into existence, give them his covenant, and lead them into the promised land because they deserved it for their faithfulness, but solely as an expression of his own saving character (‘name,’ 63:12, 14). God is Israel’s

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<sup>169</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 48.

<sup>170</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 868-869.

Father, not in any ontological sense, as the following image indicates, but in the sense that he is responsible for their existence. The same thought was expressed in 63:16.<sup>171</sup>

This is a substantial Old Testament theme developing concerning the nature of Yahweh's relationship to Israel as well as His character and disposition toward them. Yahweh is not a distant disinterested deity like those of the ANE. Rather, He is a loving, gracious, kind, compassionate, and merciful Father whom His children could call upon in their time of trouble.

Isaiah also makes a unique contribution to the portrait of Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament. Isaiah includes in the imagery of Father that of creator employing the metaphor of a potter and clay. As Motyer notes, "The child would not be there but for the father, nor the pot but for the potter, nor the artefact but for the craftsman. It is in this sense that the three figures are used."<sup>172</sup> This is not new imagery to Isaiah, but here it takes on a further depth of meaning.<sup>173</sup> This addition to the Old Testament portrait of Yahweh as Father stresses the prophet's confidence that if Yahweh brought Israel into existence, surely he would not abandon them even in their suffering. Oswalt highlights the significance of this imagery,

Here the point is more poignant: can the artist simply toss aside the thing on which he has lavished care and attention, into which he has put so much of himself? Thus Isaiah appeals to God: although our sin cannot be denied, neither can the nature of our relationship with you. Surely you will not allow our sin to frustrate your creative purposes, will you?<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 48.

<sup>172</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 869.

<sup>173</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 48.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore, Isaiah's three references to Yahweh as Israel's Father are in congruence with the other Old Testament examples while also incorporating the connection between Yahweh and His role as creator with the imagery of potter and clay.<sup>175</sup>

### *Malachi*

This survey attempting to formulate an Old Testament theology of God as Father continues with the prophet Malachi. Malachi presents two further notable and significant references to Yahweh as Father. Malachi's contribution is particularly insightful for it represents a message addressed to Israel in the post-exilic period and the author "looks behind the disaster of exile and the history of the divided nation to God's covenant with Israel mediated through Moses, and behind that to the promises to the patriarchs, of which the Jewish community in Malachi's day are the heirs."<sup>176</sup> Malachi is also unique in that both of his appeals to Yahweh as the Father of Israel are negative and serve as a rebuke of Israel's unfaithfulness to their Father. The first reference is found in Malachi 1:6: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?'" (Malachi 1:6 ESV)

Malachi shares a few major presuppositions with his fellow Old Testament authors. First, he too appeals to the general Old Testament belief that Yahweh was Israel's Father. Verhoef supports this claim by arguing that it is an:

Indisputable truth is that God is the Father and the Lord of his people. Nobody could justly deny it. The father-son relationship between God and Israel was stated at the

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<sup>175</sup> For further exegetical treatment of Isaiah, see the following works: John L. Mackay, *A Study Commentary on Isaiah* (Faverdale: Evangelical Press, 2008); Rev. Geoffrey W Grogan, Tremper Longman III, and David E Garland, *Proverbs - Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Barry G Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996).

<sup>176</sup> Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 324.

beginning of the Exodus deliverance, when Moses proclaimed the word of the Lord to Pharaoh: “Israel is my firstborn son.... Let my son go” (Exod. 4:22, 23; cf. Hos. 11:1). Afterward this relationship was mentioned explicitly (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; Mal. 2:10; Ps. 89:27) or by way of comparing it with the human relationship between father and son (Deut. 1:31; 8:5; Ps. 103:13)... Elsewhere Israel was explicitly called the “son of God” (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; Isa. 45:11; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1).<sup>177</sup>

Thus, as a post-exilic prophetic text representing late tradition in Israel, Malachi adds once again to the significance of Israel’s understanding of Yahweh as their Father. Second, Malachi shares with the other Old Testament texts addressing God as Father the view that Yahweh was the corporate Father of Israel distinct from how the New Testament will develop this theme.

Malachi also adds further depth of meaning and nuance to the Jewish theology of Yahweh as Father. Malachi combines and contrasts the realities of Yahweh as both Father and Master of Israel. Hill writes concerning the significance of this:

The prophet emphasizes YHWH’s ascribed or inherent honour as both *father* and *master*. The idea of YHWH as *Father* is tied to his role of creator (2:10; Deut. 32:6) and specifically to his election of Israel as his chosen people (1:2; 3:17). The nation that YHWH is *master* (or ‘Lord’, Heb. *’ādôn*) over his servant Israel is rooted in the Sinai covenant, establishing God as suzerain over his vassal Israel after he had delivered or redeemed them from slavery in Egypt.<sup>178</sup>

Malachi’s aim is a stern rebuke of Israel’s priests for their failure to honor and reverence Yahweh who is both their Father and Master. Whereas the modern understanding of God as Father expresses intimacy and closeness, Malachi deepens the biblical understanding of the word and concept and reveals that “The fatherhood of God in the OT is an expression of his lordship.”<sup>179</sup> This theme will be developed in the following example of Malachi’s title of Father for Yahweh. To summarize, Malachi affirms the Old Testament’s revelation of Yahweh as

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<sup>177</sup> Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 169.

<sup>178</sup> Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 24.

<sup>179</sup> Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1958), 61-62.



Israel's Father while adding to the unfolding revelation the implication of the respect and honor due Yahweh as both Father and Master.

The second instance of Yahweh addressed as Father in Malachi is in 2:10: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?" (Malachi 2:10 ESV) This verse shares significant thematic and linguistic parallels to two previous Scriptures examined, Deuteronomy 32:6 and Isaiah 64:8.<sup>180</sup> In each of these Scriptures, God's Fatherhood is tied to the creation of His people Israel. Once again, all of the biblical authors are in agreement concerning the nature of Yahweh as the creator of Israel in a manner distinct from the ANE religious beliefs of the time.<sup>181</sup> For the biblical authors, "The idea of God as Creator of Israel is intimately connected with the concepts of "redemption" (Isa. 43:1; 44:2; 63:16), God's "kingship" (Isa. 43:15), and his future concern for his people (Isa. 45:11)."<sup>182</sup> This is a recurring theme and a significant theological point throughout the Old Testament text.

The nature of Israel's sonship is directly linked to Yahweh's election of Israel and His covenant love and promises toward them actualized in calling them out of Egypt and forming them into His family (Hos. 11:1). This means that for Israel uniquely, Yahweh's relationship to them as Father is emphasized and understood, "Not in a natural sense but in the spiritual sense of adoption and on the basis of his covenant."<sup>183</sup> Malachi confronts and rebukes Israel for their faithlessness and their breach of Yahweh's covenant and appeals to the fact that Yahweh is both their Father and creator and in their rebellion, they are not only transgressing their Lord and

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<sup>180</sup> Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 206.

<sup>181</sup> Greer, Hilber, Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, 335.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

Father but also being faithless to one another and profaning the covenant of their fathers. This means that Malachi's reference to Yahweh as creator in this context most likely refers to His unique creation of Israel as His sons and daughters against His general creation of all humanity.

As Petterson highlights,

These two questions highlight the special relationship Yahweh has with his people: the national covenant is understood in terms of a kinship relationship with Yahweh and with one another. If these associations are recognized, then the creation is more likely a reference to the creation of the nation in the exodus (cf. Exod. 15:16; Deut. 32:6; Isa. 43:21) than to human creation.<sup>184</sup>

Malachi bases His condemnation of Israel's wickedness and His call to repentance and covenant fidelity upon the unfolding revelation and understanding of Yahweh as both Father and creator of Israel. Unfortunately, "With this theme, the Book of the Twelve closes as it opened, with Yahweh as a spurned father (cf. Hos. 11:1)."<sup>185</sup> Though He is a spurned Father by His people, He is still the Father of Israel, nevertheless. Thus, when Jesus arrived on the scene and began to reveal in greater depth and clarity the nature of God as Father and the implications of this for His New Covenant children, though unforeseen and unexpected, He continued a conversation begun with God's people centuries earlier.<sup>186</sup>

### *Psalms*

Twice in the Psalter is the Lord referred to directly as Father. The first example will be treated briefly for it is similar to the other usages already discussed. The second opens a new

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<sup>184</sup> Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 347.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>186</sup> To explore further Malachi's contribution to an Old Testament theology of God as Father, see the following exegetical works: Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Iain M. Duguid, *A Study Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (England: EP Books, 2010); Walter C. Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984); Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

discussion of another significant and distinct Old Testament theological understanding of Yahweh as Father that will be explored in a few texts. The first example is found in Psalm 68: “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation” (Psalm 68:5 ESV). The context of Psalm 68 is a “praise hymn” and the Psalmist’s celebration of Yahweh’s power to save.<sup>187</sup> One of the attributes of Yahweh’s power which is celebrated here is that as king and divine warrior, He uses His strength and authority to protect and care for the “The vulnerable, in particular, orphans, widows, the lonely and prisoners (Exod. 22:22-24; Ps. 146:6-9).<sup>188</sup> This is not a vague protection on Yahweh’s behalf, He is the protector and defender of the fatherless as their Father.<sup>189</sup>

Two significant points emerge here concerning the Old Testament picture of Yahweh as Father. First, this is the first reference where Yahweh is pictured more generally as acting as a father of the weak and defenseless instead of as the particular Father of his covenant people. As VanGemeran points out, “Wherever there are oppressed people, whether or not they belong to the people of God, the Lord’s rule brings transformation from injustice to justice and from oppression to vindication. He changes sorrow to ‘singing.’”<sup>190</sup> Thus, the Psalmist here uses poetic and “hymnic language” to highlight an attribute of Yahweh’s compassion, care, and concern for the needy distinct from His unique commitment to His covenant people Israel. As Kidner emphasizes, “Protection of the helpless and judgment on the lawless are marks of true

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<sup>187</sup> Gerald Henry Wilson, W. Dennis Tucker, and Jamie A. Grant, *Psalms: From Biblical Text-To Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 935.

<sup>188</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 341.

<sup>189</sup> Willem A. VanGemeran, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 598-599.

<sup>190</sup> VanGemeran, *Psalms*, 599.

kingship, human and divine, even according to the heathen; so these two verses fitly round off the praise of the kingly deliverer.”<sup>191</sup>

A second notable theological point that emerges here is the connection between Yahweh’s “holy habitation” and His paternal love and care for those in need. This will be an important theme that will be developed by Jesus in His life and ministry and discussed at length in this study’s treatment of the New Testament. For now, the correlation between Yahweh’s holiness and His Fatherly role and care are two essential elements of His person and character that cannot be separated. By linking these two concepts together, the psalmist is preparing readers for the New Testament development of this theme where Jesus introduces His disciples to their “Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9) and their “holy Father” (John 17:11). Psalm 68 then functions as a foundational text for this Old Testament revelation of Yahweh as the Father of Israel who cares paternally for His people from His Heavenly throne. This is latent throughout the Old Testament but explicitly connected here as VanGemeran excellently notes:

From ‘his holy dwelling’ in heaven (cf. Dt 26:15; Jer 25:30; Zec 2:13), the Lord watches the families of human beings. His eyes focus on the destitute and the oppressed, whose rights are trampled by the powerful and the rich. Because Israel experienced oppression in Egypt, the nation’s laws specified how the Israelites should regard the rights of the powerless (cf. Ex 22:22-24; Pss 10:14; 146:9; Isa 1:17, 23; Mal 3:5; Jas 1:27).<sup>192</sup>

Thus, for the Psalmist and as will unfold much more clearly in the New Testament, Yahweh’s holiness is intimately tied to His Fatherly love, care, and concern for His people. Here in Psalm 68, this theme of Yahweh as a holy Father ruling and reigning with all sovereignty and authority for the good of His children and even the general good of all creation begins to emerge. The

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<sup>191</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 257.

<sup>192</sup> VanGemeran, *Psalms*, 599.

connection between this Old Testament idea and the New Testament revelation and continuation of it will be discussed in a subsequent section of this study.

The next reference in the Psalter to Yahweh as Father introduces a significant and major development in the Old Testament revelation of this theological concept. All of the references to Yahweh as Father thus far have been tied to His relationship with Israel collectively as their Father who because of His compassionate love elected, rescued, and redeemed them from slavery due to His covenant promises and called them His very own children (Exodus 4.22; Hosea 11.1). Here, a second facet of Yahweh as Father arises distinct from this other Old Testament theme. This significant addition to an understanding of Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament is His unique relationship to David as King and His commitment to the Davidic Dynasty as Father. The first instance to be examined is Psalm 89:26-27 and subsequently, 2 Samuel 7:14 and parallels I Chronicles 17:13, 22:10, and 28:6.<sup>193</sup> Psalm 86 addresses specifically the “royal theology of David”<sup>194</sup> and says, “He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’ And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Psalm 89:26-27 ESV).

The Psalm is organized around a tripartite structure. The first section addresses the kingship of Yahweh (1-18), the second His covenant with David as His chosen kingly ruler (19-37), and finally, a lament at the seeming desertion of Yahweh’s care for His covenant people and their present suffering (38-52).<sup>195</sup> To begin, this passage is unique for this is the first text analyzed thus far that refers to an individual, not Israel as a corporate community, as a “son” and

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<sup>193</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 12.

<sup>194</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 763.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

Yahweh is figured as the Father of this individual. The theological foundation for understanding this passage and the theology it contains is the beautiful prophecy of 2 Samuel 7:4-17.<sup>196</sup> The heart of the promises given to David is an eternal throne and an eternal Kingdom and a unique role for himself and all who will sit upon this throne who will have the honor of calling Yahweh Father and embrace their identity as His son.<sup>197</sup> Yahweh's covenant with David was a development and continuation of the "Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants" and His promise to David was an eternal rule and dynasty.<sup>198</sup> These covenant promises and commitments made to David and his progeny in the context of Father and son form the theological background for interpreting this Psalm.

The bulk of exegetical treatment concerning this central Old Testament idea will be given to the text from which this theology passage is derived from. However, to appropriately address this Psalm, a few comments will be made. First, it is undeniable based on the context of 68:19 that the Psalmist is referring back to Nathan's anointing of and prophetic words given to David and Yahweh's eternal covenant with him.<sup>199</sup> Second, this represents a development in Jewish theology that Israel not only understood themselves as having Yahweh as their Father corporately but also the unique place of the Davidic king in Yahweh's relationship with his people. That is, "While all Israelites could be called the sons of God, David the king was the firstborn."<sup>200</sup> This concept was clear enough that just as the prophets appealed to Yahweh's Fatherhood as the basis for His fulfillment of His covenant promises, here concerning the nation

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<sup>196</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 73.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 769.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Longman, *Psalms*, 422.

the Psalmist appeals to Yahweh's exclusive and eternal promises made to David. Thus, the concept of Yahweh as Father represents both Israel collectively and the special role He plays as the Father to the David king. Finally, as has already been hinted at, the Old Testament background of Israel's corporate identity as the children of Yahweh causes David's special role as "the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" with Yahweh as His father to be an even more astounding claim and unprecedented blessing.<sup>201</sup> These privileges belonged to Israel as a collective whole, here uniquely, only David and those who would follow after Him in his royal line would have special access to and relationship with Yahweh as their Father and they as His firstborn sons.<sup>202</sup>

Finally, another point that arises here and will be addressed in detail in subsequent sections is the theological connection between Yahweh's promises to David and their ultimate fulfillment in the coming messianic ruler.<sup>203</sup> All of the promises to David and his descendants would find their climax in the coming of Jesus Christ for there is an "indissoluble union between the dynasty of David and the future Messiah."<sup>204</sup> This is an expansive issue throughout the psalms and prophetic writings for they look to the messianic ideal of what the Davidic dynasty was meant to be and clung to the promises of Yahweh to David in the hope of the day the Messiah would finally come and bring all of the promised covenant blessings.<sup>205</sup> Each of these

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<sup>201</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 77.

<sup>202</sup> Longman, *Psalms*, 422.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>204</sup> Philip J. King, *A Study of Psalm 45* (Rome: Pontifical Lateran University, 1959), 117. Quoted in, VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 779.

<sup>205</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 779.

are noteworthy developments and contributions to the Old Testament's presentation of Yahweh as Father.<sup>206</sup>

## *2 Samuel & Chronicles*

It is difficult to overestimate the theological significance of 2 Samuel 7:1-17 and its parallels in 1 Chronicles 17:13, 22:10, and 28:6 for understanding the overarching storyline of Scripture and Old Testament theology itself.<sup>207</sup> There are many significant points of discussion that go beyond the intended scope of this dissertation.<sup>208</sup> Yahweh's covenant with David certainly stands as the central theme of 2 Samuel and potentially even as the heart of the entire Old Testament.<sup>209</sup> This is not true only of the Old Testament but the Davidic covenant and promises function as "the turning point in the divine plan of salvation, as is reflected in the phrase Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1) where David, the prototype of the Messiah, God's anointed, is placed in the midpoint between Abraham (Genesis 17; cf. 12) and Jesus."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> For further treatment on the book of Psalms and the issues addressed here, see: Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2011); Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms: From Biblical Text- to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms, Vol. 1: Psalms 1-72: Evangelical Biblical Theological Commentary* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2021); Idem., *Psalms, Vol. 2: Psalms 73-150: Evangelical Biblical Theological Commentary* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2021); John Goldingay, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Peter C. Craigie, Marvin Tate, *Psalms 1-50, Volume 19: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018); Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51-100, Volume 20* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018); Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150, Volume 21: Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018).

<sup>207</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 35.

<sup>208</sup> For further detailed and helpful exegetical sources treating 2 Samuel, see the works cited in this section and the following: A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel, Volume 11* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015); Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014); Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2001); P. Kyle. McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984).

<sup>209</sup> David Toshio Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019); 18.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.



Yahweh's covenant to David became a major source of strength, hope, and encouragement for His people in the Old Testament period as they clung to the promise of the eternal house or dynasty of David through his offspring, an eternal throne, and an eternal kingdom.<sup>211</sup> Subsequently, these promises also functioned to bolster the Messianic hopes of Israel. As the "theological centerpiece of the Deuteronomic corpus," Israel looked to the Davidic dynasty for the future kings of Israel and Judah with the ultimate hope of Yahweh's promise in Genesis 3:15 of a conquering Messiah to be fulfilled now not through humanity in general but specifically through a Son of David.<sup>212</sup> Finally, as would be expected, the covenant promises to David here in 2 Samuel 7 became meaningful demonstrations of Yahweh's fulfillment of His commitment to Israel and of Jesus' identity as both the Messiah of Israel and the true Son of David.<sup>213</sup> This will be discussed later in this survey, suffice to say for now, the Davidic covenant is central to Old Testament theology, Jewish messianic hope, and the New Testament author's interpretation of the coming of Jesus the Christ.<sup>214</sup>

The verse which is pertinent to this study and stands as the climax of the Davidic covenant is 2 Samuel 7:14:<sup>215</sup> "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men..." (2 Samuel 7:14 ESV). The immediate context of this verse will be discussed first before addressing the relevant implications and significance. Just like those given to Abraham,

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<sup>211</sup> Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 18-19.

<sup>212</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 35.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 230.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

Yahweh's promises to David concern a son "yet unborn."<sup>216</sup> Though he longed to do so, David would not be permitted to build Yahweh a permanent dwelling place. It would be through David's lineage that an eternal dwelling place for Yahweh, His presence, and His glory would be built. The immediate referent of the text is to David's son Solomon. While this is hinted at by the immediate context and the parallels (1 Chronicles 17:13, 22:10), in 1 Chronicles 28:6, it is made explicitly clear that this promise would begin its fulfillment in Solomon, "He said to me, 'It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father'" (1 Chronicles 28:6 ESV). Thus, Solomon the Son of David was the first and clearest referent of this prophetic promise to David.<sup>217</sup> At the same time, these promises pointed to the Davidic dynasty which would outlast any individual Davidic heir and thus included all of David's descendants as well.<sup>218</sup> This is a second referent to Yahweh's promises to David. Finally, and most significant to the theology of both the Old and New Testaments is the reality that while this prophetic promise means that Yahweh will be the Father of David's heir and includes their unique access to Him as Father, this prophecy was ultimately and most remarkably fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David.<sup>219</sup> This promise to David would become one of the most important and significant prophetic preparations for the coming of Jesus as Israel's Messiah:

The significance of the eternal covenant between the Lord and David for the New Testament writers cannot be overemphasized. These words played an essential preparatory role in developing the messianic expectations that were fulfilled in Jesus. The hopes that were raised by the Lord's words-that God would place a seed of David on an eternal throne and establish a kingdom that would never perish-were ones that no Israelite or Judahite monarch satisfied, or even could have satisfied. But they were ones that the

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<sup>216</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 1297t.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 1297u.

<sup>218</sup> Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 139.

<sup>219</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 1297u.

first-century Christians understood Jesus to fulfill these promises.<sup>220</sup>

It is impossible to overemphasize the influence Yahweh's covenant with David had upon Israel's understanding of their relationship with Yahweh and the nature of the coming Messiah.

Ultimately, no son of David could fulfill these promises in the manner in which Jesus Christ the eternal son of God uniquely could. Jesus would do what no merely human heir could do for "the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David," He "will reign over the house of Jacob forever" and of whose "kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).<sup>221</sup> Yahweh's covenant promises to David fulfilled both immediately in Solomon and finally in Jesus Christ demonstrate and prove undeniably His faithfulness and commitment to his covenant promises. That is, "Because he is faithful to his covenant, in particular to his promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), God graciously deals with David in the same way in order that the plan of salvation be further fulfilled and finally completed in the life and death of his son Jesus Christ, the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:11b-16)."<sup>222</sup> Therefore, 2 Samuel 7 is central to understanding both the Old and New Covenants and Yahweh's relationship and dealings with His people.

As was previously stated, the dependence of the Psalmist in Psalm 68 on this prophecy is undeniable. Amid the overwhelming commitment of Yahweh to David and the establishment of an eternal Davidic kingdom and throne, the crown jewel of these promises is the unique relationship David's heirs would have with Yahweh as their Father and they as His sons. While this is a significant development of usage distinct from those that have preceded it, at the same

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<sup>220</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 338

<sup>221</sup> Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 18.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

time, there is much here that is in congruence with the general Old Testament understanding of Yahweh as the covenant Father of Israel.

First, like all other Old Testament references, Yahweh's relationship to Israel collectively and to the Davidic line as Father specifically "was not a formula of begetting but of adoption."<sup>223</sup> Once again, this is a significant distinction between the Jewish understanding of Yahweh as their Father through covenant and adoption and the ANE framework of divine paternity based on sexual and or physical begetting. As is clear from the context, just as is true for Israel collectively, it is Yahweh's election and adoption of the Davidic dynasty that grants them the unique privilege of having direct access to Yahweh as their Father and they as His sons.<sup>224</sup> The theological key to understanding the Davidic covenant is Yahweh's "electing or choosing."<sup>225</sup> The Lord uniquely chose Samuel, Saul, and David, and through the Davidic dynasty, the future kings of Judah including the long-awaited Messiah.<sup>226</sup> Therefore, though the relationship the Davidic rulers would have with Yahweh would be marked by an unparalleled place as the "son" of Yahweh with Him as their individualized "Father" climaxing in the inimitable sonship of the Messiah, the nature of this sonship through covenant and adoption matches the overarching Old Testament theology of God as Father.<sup>227</sup>

A second observation pertinent to this study is that of all the Old Testament references that directly address Yahweh as Father, this is the only instance of an individual having access to Yahweh as Father individually apart from the corporate sense and understanding of Yahweh as

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<sup>223</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 1297u.

<sup>224</sup> Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 139.

<sup>225</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 35.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 1297w.

Israel's collective Father. This is meaningful for the overwhelming theological picture of Yahweh in the Old Testament is that He is Israel's Father corporately because He has elected and adopted them as His own covenant people.<sup>228</sup> His promises and commitment to them are corporate and communal and their relation to Him is the same. Repeatedly the biblical authors have leveraged their identity as Yahweh's covenant children and called upon Him to keep his commitments to them and demonstrate His fidelity to His promises. Here, then, along with Psalm 89 which has the same referent, is the only instance of an individual having the privilege and access to Yahweh as their individual Father. The novelty of the Davidic dynasty's special place as sons of Yahweh stands out starkly in contrast to the Old Testament's theological presentation of Israel corporately being the "son" and "children" of Yahweh. It is only when the entire Old Testament is surveyed that the true significance of Yahweh's covenant with David and subsequently to his heirs emerges. Thus, the Davidic covenant stands as a unique example of Yahweh's notable commitment to David and the Davidic Dynasty's distinctiveness.

Finally, the significance of this promise not merely to David, Solomon, and all of their progeny but in preparation for the Messiah is remarkable. Of the prophecy in general and the Davidic Covenant,

The New Testament writers took their cue from Jesus himself. Three of Jesus' claims concerning himself allude to this verse. First, Jesus claimed he would build a temple (cf. Matt 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29; John 2:19-22). Second, he claimed to possess an eternal throne (cf. Matt 19:28-29). Finally, he claimed to possess an imperishable kingdom (cf. Luke 22:29-30; John 18:36).<sup>229</sup>

This is also true of the climax of the prophecy that Yahweh promised to that Davidic heir that "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." In two distinct manners, the New Testament

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<sup>228</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 1297w.

<sup>229</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 341.

authors applied this promise to Jesus as the Messiah and emphasized the significance.<sup>230</sup> First, in Hebrews 1:5, the Davidic promise is applied directly to Jesus Himself in defense of His Messiahship, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’? Or again, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son’?” (Hebrews 1:5 ESV) It is noteworthy that the New Testament authors appealed to the Davidic covenant and the unique sonship of David’s descendants and interpreted this directly as a support for Jesus of Nazareth’s claims to be Israel’s Messiah. For Jesus, the title ‘Son of God’ meant much more against the Jewish theological background especially in light of the frequent references to Jesus as the Son of David or having the throne and kingdom of His father David.<sup>231</sup> As will be explored throughout this study, Jesus would introduce His disciples to the awe-inspiring reality that through Him, all Christians can approach Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, as Abba Father.

However, using the language of sonship and Fatherhood, Christ Himself and the author of Hebrews also understood and interpreted the Davidic promise uniquely about Jesus. Jesus was the “Son of God” in a way that differs from how all believers are “children” or “sons of God.” This theme started in the Gospels and continues throughout the New Testament as this reference in Hebrews demonstrates. As Blomberg rightfully notes, “The ‘Son of God’ is a title applied to Jesus by the gospel writers to highlight his messianic and divine origin as the fulfilment of such Old Testament prophecies as Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14.”<sup>232</sup> Thus, based upon the prophetic

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<sup>230</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 1297u.

<sup>231</sup> Matthew 1:1, 1:20-22, 12:23, 15:22, 21:9; Mark 10:48, 12:35; Luke 1:32-33, 2:11, 3:31-32; John 7:42; Romans 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:8; Revelation 5:5.

<sup>232</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 251.

promise to David, Jesus is *The Son of God* in the ultimate fulfillment of this covenant with David and holds a unique place among all of God's children as the very Son of God.

The second New Testament reference to the specific promise of Yahweh being a Father and a son of David being His son is found in 2 Corinthians 6:18. In the context of Paul applying the realities of the New Covenant to believers, instructing them that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and encouraging them to embrace a life of holiness, he appeals to the beautiful promise of 2 Samuel 7:14 in a unprecedented and unexpected development of the application of this prophetic promise:

I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and *I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.* (2 Corinthians 6:16b-18 ESV)

This text represents a unique combination of Old Testament quotes, references, and paraphrases. This includes material from Leviticus 26:12; Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:41; 2 Sam 7:14; Isaiah 43:6; and potentially Jeremiah 32:38 and Ezekiel 37:27.<sup>233</sup> What is so remarkable here is that the most climactic Old Testament promise reserved solely for David and His royal heirs is now applied to all New Covenant believers. Through Jesus Christ, the Son of David, and the ultimate fulfillment of Yahweh's covenant with David, all believers now have intimate access to Yahweh as Father in a manner unimaginable in the Old Testament. The very same text which is used to defend the messiahship of Jesus is also applied to the wonderful blessing and privilege of what it means to be "in Christ" and to be a receiver and heir of the New Covenant.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> The nature of this combination of Old Testament quotes, references, and paraphrases was brought to my attention by the NET Bible, Biblical Studies Press, Study Note, 2 Corinthians 6:16b-18.

<sup>234</sup> There are three Old Testament parallels to 2 Samuel 7:14 which record the very same promise from Yahweh given to David. Those are, 1 Chronicles. 17.13; 22.10; 28.6.

This theological development will be especially significant as this study moves to the New Testament and the development and continuation of the theme of Yahweh as Father and the implications this has for New Testament believers. Suffice it to say for now, it is impossible to overemphasize the theological weight and significance of Yahweh's covenant with David and His promise to Him in 2 Samuel 7:14. Besides the theological ramifications in the Old Testament and how it expands the Jewish vision of Yahweh as Father, it also has major theological and exegetical importance in the New Testament applied in a variety of manners as demonstrated here. In summary, Yahweh is faithful to His promise and this is demonstrated undeniably in His covenant commitment to David and His precious invitation to treat the Davidic heirs as sons and to be to them a Father. This promise was ultimately and finally fulfilled in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, who would be the only one able to receive an eternal kingdom and sit upon an eternal throne as the very Son of God Himself. Through His finished work, all believers would have unprecedented intimacy and access with Yahweh receiving the fullness of Christ's inheritance and having the privilege and honor of calling Yahweh Father and they too being His sons and daughters. The full effect of this New Testament development of an Old Testament theme and its theological implications and ramifications will be treated in the following chapters.

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“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.” (1 Chronicles 17:13-14 ESV)

“He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.” (1 Chronicles 22:10 ESV)

“He said to me, ‘It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.’” (1 Chronicles 28:6 ESV)

While there is some theological nuance and important differentiation between the presentation of this promise by the author of 2 Samuel and Chronicles, because they record the same promise, only the reference in 2 Samuel was treated directly.



## *Jeremiah*

There are at least three direct references to Yahweh as Father in the prophet Jeremiah. Each of these instances will be treated in seeking to form a holistic Old Testament theology of Yahweh as Father of Israel. The first two are found in Jeremiah chapter three. The immediate context is a continuation of the prophet's rebuke of Israel as an unfaithful wife to Yahweh.<sup>235</sup> Chapter two opens the first prophetic section of the book with Jeremiah confronting Israel for their infidelity to Yahweh and calling them to repentance. This first major section opens in chapter 2:1 and concludes in 4:4.<sup>236</sup> Thus the entire section revolves around this dual theme of "apostasy and repentance" with chapter two focusing on Israel's apostasy and chapter three calling them back to covenant fidelity through repentance to Yahweh.<sup>237</sup> Interestingly, the two references to Yahweh as Father coincide with the main theme of the section, with the first reference drawing attention to Israel's apostasy, and the second within the call to repentance.

The first reference in Jeremiah 3:4 reads, "Have you not just now called to me, 'My father, you are the friend of my youth...'" (Jeremiah 3:4 ESV). Jeremiah shifts from the analogy of Israel as Yahweh's unfaithful wife to that of Israel as Yahweh's unfaithful children. The context is especially significant when considering Yahweh's charge against Israel in chapter two. Yahweh condemns Israel for adopting the pagan practices and beliefs of their ANE contemporaries and whoring after false God's calling a tree their "father" and looking to a stone as the one that "gave them birth,"<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 137.

<sup>236</sup> J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1999), 249-331.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed: they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave me birth.’ For they have turned their back to me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble, they say, ‘Arise and save us!’ But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah. (Jeremiah 2:26-28 ESV)

Israel had forsaken Yahweh like an unfaithful wife and now,<sup>239</sup> as a stubborn and rebellious child.<sup>240</sup> The stark contrast between their desertion of Yahweh their Father in pursuit of false gods reveals that their desperate pleas to Him due to punishment and the onset of draught are not genuine.<sup>241</sup> In Jeremiah 3:4, Yahweh highlights both the “hypocrisy” and “infidelity” of Israel’s empty appeal to Him as Father.<sup>242</sup> Though they now seek to appeal to His mercy and claim Him as Father and friend, Yahweh addresses Israel directly that though you “have spoken” and addressed Him as Father, you “have done all the evil that you could.” Thus, this use of Father by Yahweh directly but in reference to Israel’s shallow and empty appeals to Him is employed to highlight their hypocrisy and infidelity. Yahweh’s charge against Israel is that their “Fine words were not matched by corresponding deeds.”<sup>243</sup>

Thus, a few significant principles arise from this text which are insightful for the ever-growing and expanding Old Testament vision and understanding of what it means for Israel to have Yahweh as Father. The first is that while Father was “not a common designation for Yahweh in the OT, even though the idea is present (Exodus 4:22; Isaiah 1:2; Hosea 11:1),”<sup>244</sup> it

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<sup>239</sup> Andrew J. Dearman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2002), 58-59.

<sup>240</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 75-76.

<sup>241</sup> Derek Kidner, *Jeremiah* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 36.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 141.

<sup>244</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 303.

was present enough within the Jewish religious worldview that when they were in need, even after great apostasy and infidelity against Yahweh, Israel knew that if they wanted to return to Him, they would do so as His children in pursuit of their covenant Father. In the text, Yahweh does not rebuke them for approaching Him wrongly or correcting their theological understanding of Him as their Father, only that their sinful actions discredited their theologically accurate prayer.

A second point in this text that has repeatedly emerged throughout this study is the theologically distinct nature of Yahweh as Israel's Father against the ANE milieu.<sup>245</sup> In verses 26-28 of chapter 2, Israel is rebuked for their adoption of foreign and pagan religious practices. It appears that Israel was influenced by their ANE neighbors and looked to the creation, rather than the creator, for their source of religious identity by putting their trust in idols crafted by their own hands. Jeremiah employs biting satire and sarcasm here in not only condemning Israel for this act of infidelity and apostasy against Yahweh but also in charging them with confusion in their failure to even worship their false gods accurately.<sup>246</sup> Israel reverses the pagan understanding of divine paternity for, "In fertility cults, a tree is often the symbol of female fertility and a stone (in the form of a pillar) the symbol of male fertility."<sup>247</sup> Here, however, Israel has called the female symbol "father" and addressed the male symbol as the one who has given them birth.<sup>248</sup> Thus, Israel is charged with both forsaking Yahweh for worthless and powerless idols and in their

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<sup>245</sup> This text further affirms the claims presented in chapter two concerning the relationship between the Old Testament and the ANE world in which they lived and wrote within. Greer, Hilber, Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, 333-335.

<sup>246</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 132.

<sup>247</sup> Dearman, *Jeremiah*, 51.

<sup>248</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 132.

pursuit of worshipping false gods, missing even the identity of the idols they sought to worship. The consequence of this was Yahweh's judgment upon His own covenant children.<sup>249</sup> It was Yahweh's judgment and the inefficacy of their pursuit of false gods that led Israel to try once again to approach Yahweh as their covenant "Father."<sup>250</sup> Thus, once again the distinction between the pagan understanding of divine paternity stands in stark contrast against the Old Testament's revelation of Yahweh as the covenant Father of Israel.

The second usage of Father for Yahweh in Jeremiah occurs in this same chapter, in verse 19: "I said, How I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 3:19-20 ESV). The context once again is Yahweh confronting Israel for their apostasy and calling them to repentance. Verses 19-20 are directly linked to the end of the poetic section in verses 4-5 with the interruption and assertion of 3:6-19.<sup>251</sup> The metaphor of Yahweh as Father and His desire for Israel to be His covenant sons is coupled again with that of Israel as a treacherous and unfaithful wife.<sup>252</sup> The contrast is stark when examining these two references to Yahweh as Father in Jeremiah 3.<sup>253</sup> In the first instance, Israel is rebuked for calling upon Yahweh as their Father yet denying Him with the hypocrisy and infidelity of their actions. In contrast to this, in verse 19, Yahweh reveals His desire to Israel

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<sup>249</sup> Dearman, *Jeremiah*, 51.

<sup>250</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 132.

<sup>251</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 148,

<sup>252</sup> Dearman, *Jeremiah*, 60.

<sup>253</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 249-331.

that He intends to set Israel as His son, to bless them and that they would not merely call Him Father but enjoy the blessing of this covenant relationship.<sup>254</sup>

This revelation is especially significant in developing an Old Testament theology of Yahweh as covenant Father in Israel for this text uniquely expresses the inner disposition and desire of Yahweh Himself.<sup>255</sup> Here is a window into the heart of God and His longing for His people even in their rebellion and apostasy.<sup>256</sup> Yahweh desired to be called Father by Israel, He desired to care for them as His sons, and He desired to bless them abundantly. Jeremiah the prophet serves not only as the mouthpiece of Yahweh but as the prophetic expression and declaration of His deepest desires. What is expressed clearly here is that “God intended to establish an intimate relationship with Israel. They would call him Father and be like sons to him.”<sup>257</sup> Yahweh’s passionate desire for His covenant children stands out most clearly against their rejection of Him and rebellion against His desire toward them.

Thus, a few significant theological points emerge here that add significant depth, beauty, and nuance to the ever-expanding Old Testament vision of Yahweh as Father. First, though Israel is rebuked for calling Yahweh Father while persisting in their hypocrisy and infidelity, the problem was not that their understanding of Yahweh was flawed. Rather, it was their hypocritical approach to Him. Based upon prior Scriptural revelation, Israel understood their place as Yahweh’s covenant children. In their distress due to punishment, they sought to appeal to His paternal nature as the basis for His intervention in their situation. Jeremiah the prophet opens up and reveals the heart of the Father in a manner only the prophets can. What a dilemma is created

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<sup>254</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 148-149.

<sup>255</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 318.

<sup>256</sup> Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 81.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

in the heart of Yahweh when the desire of His heart to love and care for Israel as His children and He as their Father is desecrated by their spiritual apostasy. The very ones who called to a tree as their father and to a stone as the source of their life neglected and dishonored the very one who created them, elected them, rescued them from Egypt, lavished His love upon them through His covenant promises, and longed to be their Father. Jeremiah 3:19-20 then reveals the passionate love, longing, and desire of Yahweh to serve as the Father of Israel and care for His children. This desire was not negated by their desecration of this title. Yahweh called Israel to repentance and to return to Him as their covenant Father.

The third instance of Yahweh as Father in the book of Jeremiah takes place within the “hope oracle”<sup>258</sup> of Jeremiah 31:9, “With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn” (Jeremiah 31:9 ESV). Jeremiah 9:7-9 represents an “independent oracle” of hope for Israel in the larger context of the prophet speaking hope on Yahweh’s behalf for exiled Northern Israel to return home.<sup>259</sup> While there is a great deal of theological significance latent within these verses, the focus will be upon the father and son imagery used by Jeremiah the prophet.

The imagery employed by Jeremiah<sup>260</sup> envisions a “New Exodus” as Yahweh gathers His people from the north and the from farthest parts of the earth as they walk beside brooks of water

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<sup>258</sup> J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1999), 368–546.

<sup>259</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 388.

<sup>260</sup> Thompson notes that these, “These verses have some striking similarities in style and thought to the latter chapters of Isaiah... (Isaiah 35; 40:3– 5, 11; 41:18– 20; 42:16; 43:1– 7; 44:3– 4; 48:20– 21; 49:9– 13). Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 389.

in return to their homeland.<sup>261</sup> Not only is the specific imagery of Yahweh's rescue of His people reminiscent of the Exodus but pertinent to this study is also His address of "Ephraim" as His firstborn son and He as their Father.<sup>262</sup> Throughout Jeremiah Ephraim is a common designation for Northern Israel and the former Northern kingdom which had been taken into exile.<sup>263</sup>

The term בְּכֹרִי is used both here and in Exodus 4:22 with roots in the "Exodus tradition."<sup>264</sup> Significantly, the Father and son imagery of Yahweh to Israel is placed in the context of His covenant commitment to them. Just as His rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt is what demonstrated that he was their Father and they His children, so too as Jeremiah prophesies of the hope of restoration of Israel, the hope is anchored in Yahweh's identity as their covenant Father and they as His firstborn son.<sup>265</sup>

Both Thompson and Lundbom highlight that "The term father is not used a great deal for God in the OT."<sup>266</sup> Therefore, when it is employed by the Old Testament authors, it carries significant theological significance. This is certainly true here in Jeremiah. The clearest connection between Yahweh as Father and His covenant commitment to Israel goes back to the

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<sup>261</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 389.

<sup>262</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 425-426.

<sup>263</sup> "Readers should take note of the term Israel in context. Verse 9 uses the term to refer specifically to the former northern kingdom by way of comparison with Ephraim, God's "firstborn" (cf. Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1)." Dearman, 243; "While Israel may stand for the entirety of the land, north and south, it is interesting that that term and especially Ephraim in verse 11 are ways of referring to the northern portion. Jeremiah's vision is of a united, whole Israel." Longman, 307; "Reference here is only to Northern Israel, as in Jeremiah elsewhere (7:15; 31:9, 18, 20) and all through the book of Hosea." Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 425-426.

<sup>264</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 425.

<sup>265</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 389.

<sup>266</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 389; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 368-546.

song of Moses and specifically Deuteronomy 32:6 which was addressed previously. Yahweh's love for Israel was most clearly demonstrated in His election and rescue of them for Israel:

In Deut. 32:6 it is used to describe the close bond between Israel and Yahweh. Hosea used the picture of a son as a symbol of Yahweh's favor toward Israel during the Exodus period (Hos. 11:1–6; cf. Exod. 4:22). Jeremiah's use of the term lies in this context. Israel is the firstborn, not because she is superior to Judah but because Yahweh will renew with her the same fatherly love he displayed in centuries past.<sup>267</sup>

Thus, Father imagery for Yahweh tied to His covenant commitment to Israel is a rare, but significant expression of both Yahweh's love and commitment to His people. In Jeremiah 31:7–9, both of these theologically weighty Old Testament concepts are brought together to highlight that even in their apostasy, rebellion, and amid punishment in exile, Yahweh was still a Father to Israel and they were still His firstborn son.<sup>268</sup>

What then are the significant theological points that arise from this text? First, as has been demonstrated time and time again, in every instance of the Old Testament authors addressing Yahweh as Father or appealing to this aspect of His nature, it is always in the context of His covenant relationship with Israel in distinction from ANE parallels. Israel's self-understanding based upon Yahweh's revelation of Himself is that it was through the Exodus and Yahweh's covenant with them that constituted their identity as His children amidst the nations. Thus, Father on the lips of the Old Testament prophets or in the minds of the Jewish people was inextricably tied to Yahweh's covenant love, rescue, and fidelity to His people.

A second significant theological point in the text is that Yahweh Himself appeals to His identity as Israel's Father and to Israel (Ephraim) as His firstborn son.<sup>269</sup> Yahweh's role as

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<sup>267</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 389.

<sup>268</sup> Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 307.

<sup>269</sup> "Ephraim as Yahweh's 'firstborn' finds biblical support in 1 Chr 5:1–3, where Reuben's birthright is given to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, and in Gen 48:8–20, where Ephraim is placed ahead of Manasseh by a grandfather (Jacob) who himself supplanted an older twin. Yahweh's rejection of 'Ephraim' for



Israel's Father is one of the Old Testament's most beautiful and enlightening revelations of the heart and interior emotional state of the Lord.<sup>270</sup> Resisting the often-held dichotomy between the supposed Old Testament and New Testament portraits of God, Yahweh's relationship to His children as Father in the Old Testament, though sparse and progressively developing, prepares the way for the explosion of revelation in the New Testament addressing God directly as Father. Verse 20 of the same chapter once again appeals not only to Yahweh's covenant commitment to Israel or to his historical action in saving them but to the wonder of His passionate love for His people, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 31:20 ESV) Yahweh is not only faithful to His people because of His covenant promises but also because of the mystery of His divine love toward them. This echoes a nearly identical refrain by Yahweh in Hosea 11, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender." (Hosea 11:8 ESV)

This is a point that could be reiterated time and time again throughout the Old Testament corpus. In Hosea 11 for example, Yahweh directly connects His deliverance of Israel and His covenant with them to His Fatherly love, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." (Hosea 11:1 ESV) Like a tender Father with His beloved child, Yahweh reveals how He has cared for Israel (Ephraim), "Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms..." (Hosea 11:3 ESV) Thus, Yahweh's deliverance of Israel and His covenant

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'Judah' in Ps 78:67-68 is claimed in light of Northern Israel's destruction in 722 b.c.; and in Ps 89:27-28 [Eng 89:26-27], where Yahweh is said to be 'Father' to David, his firstborn, the meaning is that David is preeminent among the kings of the earth." Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 425-426.

<sup>270</sup> Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 307.

fidelity to His promises made to them must not be separated from His tender and compassionate love and care for His beloved children. This theological revelation must be incorporated into each instance of Yahweh pictured as the Father of Israel.

The final theological point to be made here is that once again, in complete solidarity with the entirety of Old Testament revelation, it is Israel corporately who claims Yahweh as Father, not any individual Israelite. The Old Testament is unanimous in its presentation of Yahweh as the covenant Father of a corporate people in contrast to the development of this theme in the New Testament. This point has been demonstrated time and time again in each instance of biblical imagery for Yahweh as Father of Israel. This point is noteworthy for it highlights the striking development of this theme in the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and its novelty against the Jewish Scriptural revelation and presentation of Yahweh as covenant Father.<sup>271</sup> This point will be addressed in detail and at length in the subsequent sections.

#### *General Old Testament References To Yahweh as Father and Israel as His Children*

The preceding material has dealt with every direct reference to Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament. The thesis of this dissertation is concerned primarily with direct references to Yahweh as Father in seeking to establish a unified understanding of the Old Testament's presentation of Yahweh as Father and the theological implications of this for Jesus' use of Abba Father in his teaching and prayer. For this reason, the detailed exegetical work has been limited

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<sup>271</sup> For further detailed exegetical and theological works which deal with the text of Jeremiah, see: Walter C. Kaiser Jr., and Tiberius Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2019); John L. Mackay, *Jeremiah: A Mentor Commentary* (United Kingdom: Mentor, 2015); F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993); R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973).

For a better theological understanding of Jeremiah the prophet and his work, refer to one of three works by Jack R. Lundbom: *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); *Jeremiah: Prophet Like Moses* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015); *Jeremiah Among the Prophets*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2013).

to these direct references.<sup>272</sup> This delineation of material examined is due to the nature of this investigation. It is not merely the concept of Yahweh as Father with which this project is concerned. Rather, it is how Christ addressed the covenant God of the Old Testament directly and personally as Abba Father and taught His disciples to do the same. Thus, the material of most significance are the texts where Yahweh is addressed directly as Yahweh. This does not mean that the other examples are not relevant, only that they are not as pertinent to this study. However, a few of the most significant Old Testament texts concerning the Fatherhood of God or sonship of Israel will be briefly addressed to provide necessary background information and context as the New Testament text is approached.

Two of the most important and influential Old Testament texts which do not directly call Yahweh Father but contribute to a theology of the sonship of Israel have been briefly addressed in this study; Exodus 4:22 and Hosea 11:1. The foundation of all Old Testament references to Yahweh as Israel's Father and their special role as His children can be traced back to Exodus 4:22. Here, as Moses speaks on Yahweh's behalf, He demands the release of Israel, His "firstborn son" (4:22) and that Pharaoh release His "son" that "he" may serve Yahweh. Moses' proclamation reveals,

The close and tender protected relationship of Israel to God, as firstborn son to father, and to contrast it to the deadly fate that awaited the firstborn of Egypt, individualized in Pharaoh's son. God had chosen Israel for election to a special status, that of firstborn son, with the implication of inheritance that went with it. Israel's coming inheritance certainly included the promised land of Canaan but included also the special relationship of God's presence.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> For a work which seeks to address the entirety of the Old Testament's revelation of Yahweh as a father, see: Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing God through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

<sup>273</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 125.

Two major theological truths are communicated in this verse. First, the special relationship that Israel will have with Yahweh as His children, for they are His chosen covenant people.<sup>274</sup> Second, this text also reveals the unique status that Israel as a nation enjoyed before YHWH (cf. 19:4–6).<sup>275</sup> Therefore, though it does not use the Word Father for Yahweh, Exodus 4:22-23 is a foundational text in understanding Yahweh as the Father of Israel and their identity to Yahweh as His “treasured possession among all peoples... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5-6 ESV) Hosea 11:1 refers back to this event in recounting the historical reality from Yahweh’s perspective as Father that “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hosea 11:1). This text was briefly mentioned above and therefore will not be dealt with at length. Suffice to say, the prophet Hosea demonstrates that Yahweh’s electing love and adoption and redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt was due to his love for them as a Father desirous of His son. Both of these texts, while not utilizing the term Father for Yahweh, contribute immensely to forming an Old Testament theology of Yahweh as the Father of Israel.

The next set of texts do not address Yahweh directly as Father but instead, He is compared with an earthly father. Each of these texts contributes to the overall picture of what it means for Yahweh to be a Father to Israel and the nature of His relationship with them as His children. Deuteronomy 1:31 Notes that “the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son.” Here, Yahweh’s redemption of Israel from Egypt and His providential care for them in the wilderness is understood through the lens of His love for Israel as their Father. In Deuteronomy 8:5, the discipline of the Lord is compared to that of a Father, “as a man disciplines his son, the

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<sup>274</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus. Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 106.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Lord your God disciplines you.” In Psalm 103:13, the compassion of the Lord is highlighted like that of a Father to His children, for, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.” Finally, echoing the reference in Deuteronomy 8:5, the author of Proverbs notes that “The Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” (Proverbs 3:12) Each of these instances of Yahweh’s nature and dealings with His people being compared to that of a loving, gracious, compassionate, Father add a depth of theological nuance to the texts exegeted above in this study.

Perhaps the most significant point that emerges from these few metaphors is the element of love in the Old Testament authors' usage of Father for Yahweh. Whereas the ANE imagery of divine paternity typically signified the literal and physical paternity of the gods for humans, it lacks any element of love, compassion, or genuine care from the deities toward humanity. In the exegetical survey of each direct reference to Yahweh as Father, this nuance of Yahweh’s paternal love for His people was latent in the usage based on the general Old Testament perspective yet not highlighted at length. It is significant that in each of the above references to Yahweh as Father, this element of Yahweh’s love for His children is incorporated into the exegesis and interpretation of the text.

Another non-direct reference to Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament is the refrain that Israel and the Jews are the sons of Yahweh implying the Fatherhood of Yahweh. For example, the instructions concerning holiness and the religious lifestyle of the Jewish people are rooted in their identity as children of Yahweh, with the text saying, “You are the sons of the Lord your God...” (Deuteronomy 14:1) In the same chapter that helped to establish a biblical-theological foundation for Yahweh as Father and creator, Deuteronomy 32:6, is a reference to Israel as Yahweh’s “sons and daughters” who provoked His anger, “The Lord saw it and spurned them,

because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters.” (Deuteronomy 32:19) Not only did Israel receive a unique level of love, care, and attention from Yahweh because they are His covenant children, at the same time, they bear a unique responsibility before Him to offer Him their complete, undivided, and unadulterated devotion to Yahweh. Israel was uniquely punished and held accountable to the covenant for they alone among the nations of the earth are Yahweh’s chosen covenant children.

The prophet Isaiah employs a litany of references to Israel as the covenant children of Yahweh. The entire book opens with Isaiah placing his prophetic oracles in the context of Israel as rebellious children against their Father, “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.” (Isaiah 1:2). In chapter 3, Isaiah again compares Israel to “stubborn children” who refuse to submit to Yahweh’s will or plans and instead, persist in their disobedience. These first two instances of familial language employed to describe Israel’s relationship to Yahweh emphasize the severity of Israel’s disobedience. As children of Yahweh, they ought to have been faithful and obedient to Him. However, instead of offering Yahweh the honor and obedience He deserves as their Father, they rebelled against Him and received judgment. Thus, the employment of familial language was used by Isaiah to draw attention to their covenant infidelity.

In chapter 30, the nature of the allusion changes. Instead of Isaiah calling Israel children of Yahweh to accentuate their disobedience, it is used to emphasize Yahweh’s love and covenant commitment to His children. Isaiah 30 is an oracle of hope that Yahweh will soon bring His scattered children home, “I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” (Isaiah 30:6-7 ESV) This

text helps to illustrate that Yahweh as Israel's Father develops a dual usage in the Old Testament and especially among the prophets. Israel's identity as children of Yahweh can be appealed to in order to stress the severity of their apostasy, rebellion, and covenant infidelity. Or it can be employed by the biblical authors to stress Yahweh's passionate, compassionate, covenant-keeping love toward His children and their special status among the nations as His children. The context of Isaiah 30:6-7 makes this even clearer where just a few verses earlier, Yahweh addresses His children declaring, "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life." (Isaiah 30:4) It is because Israel is Yahweh's treasured possession and due to His love toward them that they are called His children and He their Father. This dual nature of Father/son imagery is a significant development to the unfolding Old Testament theology of what it meant for Israel to have Yahweh as their Father.

A final and insightful example from Isaiah is Isaiah 45:10-11 where Yahweh's role as creator of humanity is coupled with the revelation of Him as Father, "Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in labor?'" Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: "Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands?" (Isaiah 45:10-11 ESV) This is another fascinating passage for Yahweh indirectly appeals to the fact that He is not merely the creator of Israel but also their Father. Though they wrestle with His plan of redemption and disagree with His methods, just as the clay cannot argue with its potter, neither should Yahweh's children argue with His plan. This is significant because not only do the biblical authors themselves appeal to Yahweh's roles as Israel's father as a significant bedrock of

their theology but Yahweh himself places His dealings with Israel in the context of them as His covenant children.<sup>276</sup>

The other examples from the book of Isaiah were treated above. Those instances are not mere references or allusions to Yahweh as Father but direct addresses employing the term Father for Yahweh. Thus, while many of the references throughout Isaiah do not directly use the term Father for Yahweh, Israel as His son and the implications of them being His children abound throughout the prophetic text.

The final major text which includes Father and or son language which will be addressed comes from the minor prophets, and that is Hosea.<sup>277</sup> Hosea 11:1 was discussed above as one of the foundational Old Testament texts in formulating an Old Testament theology of Yahweh as Father.<sup>278</sup> Here, a final important example concludes this biblical theological survey of the Old Testament text. Hosea 1:10 helps demonstrate the ever-unfolding Jewish understanding of their identity as children of Yahweh, “Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God’” (Hosea 1:10 ESV). The messianic vision and their hope of restoration was that they would one day be restored and trade their shame for the honor, joy, and privilege of being called “Children of the living God.”<sup>279</sup> There is a striking contrast between Israel’s divided and rebellious state as “children of whoredom” in Hosea 1:2 and the coming mercy of Yahweh to restore them to be the

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<sup>276</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, clxi; Motyer, *Isaiah*, 325.

<sup>277</sup> Youngblood, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 1297w.

<sup>278</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 303.

<sup>279</sup> David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 47-48.



“Children of the living God.”<sup>280</sup> This affirms the significant link throughout the entire Old Testament between Yahweh’s covenant with Israel which is the basis for their sonship and His role as their Father.<sup>281</sup> Against the religious landscape of the ANE, Yahweh’s paternity of Israel is due to His election and covenant keeping with them rather than a physical or sexual connotation of creation.<sup>282</sup> This continues the Old Testament’s unified assertion that Yahweh was the Father of Israel and their place as His children depended upon their commitment and fidelity to the covenant He made with them.<sup>283</sup>

### **Conclusion: Summary of Old Testament Exegetical Analysis**

It is of the utmost significance to accurately understand the Old Testament presentation of Yahweh as Father as conceived in ancient Israel through their Scriptures for this forms the theological and cultural background for the New Testament and the life and teaching of Jesus. For, “The very elements of God's Fatherhood in the Old Testament, illumined as they are by the role of the father in Israelite society, provide the substantive framework for understanding the assertions of the New Testament that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>284</sup> Thus, this chapter has sought to thoroughly examine each instance of Father language for Yahweh in the Old Testament text and formulate a biblical theological understanding of Yahweh as Father in

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<sup>280</sup> Andrew J. Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 104.

<sup>281</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2020), 37-38.

<sup>282</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 37-38.

<sup>283</sup> For further treatment of Hosea 1:10 or 11:1 which are both pertinent texts for a holistic Old testament theology of God as father, see the following works: Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1980); Duane A. Garrett and Paul Ferris, *Hosea, Joel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1997); Derek Kidner, *The Message of Hosea* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 1984); Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

<sup>284</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 38.

Israel.<sup>285</sup> Before moving to this same topic in Second Temple Judaism, a few concluding remarks will be made to summarize the material presented here.<sup>286</sup>

First, while the Fatherhood of God is one of the central theological tenants in the New Testament, it may come as a surprise then that, “The concept of the fatherhood of God is not as common in the Old Testament as might be assumed.”<sup>287</sup> This study has surveyed the 15 primary instances in the entirety of the Old Testament where Yahweh is called Father directly. Again, the Fatherhood of Yahweh is significant to accurately understanding the Old Testament, yet, as Wright notes, “‘Father’ is not the common or normal form of address to God in the Old Testament.”<sup>288</sup> Wright points to Psalms, the major “Book of Israelite hymns and prayers,” as an illustration of the scarcity of Fatherhood language in the Old Testament for Yahweh. For, where Father would be expected to be used as a direct address to Yahweh based upon New Testament prayers, in the Psalms, “It is not used.”<sup>289</sup> This does not mean that the Old Testament teaching concerning Yahweh as a Father or the examples of addressing Him as such are not significant for, as Medved rightfully states, “The fatherhood of God is not one of the major doctrines of the Old Testament, yet it is a very important one, revealing the nature of God and providing a foundation for continuity and expansion in the New Testament.”<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Once again, for thorough and detailed exegetical treatment of this topic, see the following works: Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing God Through the Old Testament* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019); David Russell Tasker, “The Fatherhood of God: An Exegetical Study From the Hebrew Scriptures” (2001). Dissertations. 152.

<sup>287</sup> Fazel Ebriham Freeks, “The Locus of Scripture in the Formulation of Fatherhood in the Old Testament: Exploratory and Reflective Discussions,” *Pharos Journal of Theology*, Volume 101 (2020), 3.

<sup>288</sup> J. H. Wright, *Knowing God Through the Old Testament* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 299.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Goran Medved, “The Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament.” *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (July 2016): 213.

This is an essential point of this study that will have profound exegetical weight as the New Testament text is approached. While this theme is present in the Old Testament and there is a great deal of continuity between the Testaments with the Old Testament establishing the necessary theological foundation for this concept, nothing could have prepared the Jewish people for the unprecedented development of this theme and the explosion of its usage by Jesus and the biblical authors in the New Testament.<sup>291</sup>

The second important concluding remark to summarize an Old Testament conception of Yahweh as Father is that primarily within ancient Israel, Yahweh was understood as the corporate Father of Israel based upon His electing love and covenant with them. As has been demonstrated, this is quite distinct from the ANE understanding of the gods as the physical progenitors of human creation. Yahweh's Fatherhood of Israel depends upon His historical actions of covenant with the people of Israel, electing them as His chosen people due to his passionate and tender love for them, rescuing them from Egypt, and calling them into corporate and covenant relationship with Himself as their Father. This is perhaps the most foundational manner of understanding Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament. Yahweh's Fatherhood is inextricably tied to His electing love and covenant fidelity to Israel as His son and He as their Father.<sup>292</sup> For, in the Old Testament, "God sees himself and proclaims himself as the father of Israel. Moreover, his acts toward Israel clearly exhibit his fatherhood."<sup>293</sup> This idea was

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<sup>291</sup> For an excellent study exploring the continuity or discontinuity between the Old and New Testament portraits, understanding, and teaching concerning Yahweh as Father, see: Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "God the Father in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity: Transformed Background or Common Ground?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38, no. 4 (Fall 2001).

<sup>292</sup> As Walter Kaiser notes concerning the centrality of Yahweh's covenant with Israel in the Old Testament, "If the center of Old Testament theology is the tripartite promise, 'I will be their God, they will be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of them' the concept of the fatherhood of God is suitable to that promise." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 32.

<sup>293</sup> Medved, *The Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament*, 21.

illustrated throughout the entirety of the Old Testament text in the preceding exegetical survey. Thus, as Thompson so eloquently summarizes based on her own survey of the Old Testament material,

In the Old Testament the designation of God as Father pertains primarily to the relationship between God and Israel. Israel is God's firstborn child and, as such, is also God's heir, who receives from God the promised inheritance, portion, or share of God's blessings specifically intended for Israel. God provides, cares for, and sometimes also disciplines Israel in its disobedience. As Father, God merits honor and obedience. Obviously individuals are implicated in these statements, but the various promises and injunctions focus on the relationship of the people to God, what God has done for them, and on their obligations to each other within the community.<sup>294</sup>

The only potential exception to this is found in the unique relationship Yahweh formed with the Davidic kings. This was discussed above but even among the Davidic kings, their more individualized relationship with Yahweh was “as a representative of the people” and even among them, there are no direct examples of them understanding themselves as the individual rather than corporate sons of Yahweh and they never address Him directly as Father.<sup>295</sup>

The third significant point that emerges from this Old Testament survey is that there are no examples of anyone addressing Yahweh directly or personally as Father in the Hebrew Scriptures. When Jesus of Nazareth arrived on the scene, this was His favorite and only manner of addressing Yahweh, the covenant God of the Old Testament. Thus, it may come as a surprise that this is completely foreign to the Old Testament. For, in the Old Testament, “There are no explicit statements that recount a human being addressing God as ‘Father.’”<sup>296</sup> This becomes exegetically crucial to understand as the New Testament text is approached. Again, this assertion does not mean that Father wasn't a significant way of understanding Yahweh or approaching

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<sup>294</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 47-48.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 266.

Him. Rather, it merely demonstrates that no one approached Him as intimately or directly as Jesus of Nazareth. While it is correct to appeal to the fact that Father was not a novel way of understanding Yahweh in the Old Testament, it also must be stated explicitly that no one ever addressed Him directly in this manner in any way that resembles Jesus. Thus, while there is significant continuity between the two Testaments' presentation of Yahweh as Father, Jesus' use of direct address for Him as such and His instruction for His disciples to do the same is truly extraordinary and represents a sizeable shift and development of this theme.<sup>297</sup>

Finally, the veracity, validity, and exegetical significance of the above point is highlighted even further when it is taken into consideration that there is no use of Abba or a term like it for Yahweh anywhere in the Old Testament. As will be explored in depth in the coming sections of this study, this survey of the Old Testament has demonstrated undeniably that not only does no one in the Jewish religion address Yahweh directly as their Father, addressing Him as intimately as a child and claiming direct and personal access to Him was unthinkable. While not merely novel, Jesus' approach to Yahweh within the framework of the Old Testament bordered on blasphemous. However, the intimate and personal fatherhood of God and the accessibility believers have with Him through the New Covenant is not only a central theme for the life and teaching of Christ but for all of the New Testament authors. This point will be explored in the Jewish literature from the Second Temple period in the subsequent section. Suffice it to say for now, no one addressed Yahweh with such intimacy and access in the entirety of the Old Testament as Jesus would demonstrate so frequently in the New Testament.

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<sup>297</sup> The context of the quote above from Tasker does not imply on his part that Father wasn't a significant way of understanding Yahweh or approaching Him. Rather, it merely demonstrates that no one approached Him as intimately or directly as Jesus of Nazareth. Tasker posits that there is a possibility that some approached Yahweh in this manner, but there is no evidence to prove so: "Although there are no explicit statements that recount a human being addressing God as 'Father,' the evidence points strongly in that direction, and the evidences of such a close and intimate relationship are seen across the spectrum of the Hebrew Scriptures." Tasker, *The Fatherhood of God*, 266.

## Chapter 4: God as Father in Second Temple Judaism

### Introduction: Second Temple Judaism and the Background of the New Testament

Another fundamental area of research to further understand the Jewish conception of Yahweh as Father is the Second Temple Period. In recent decades, there has been an explosion of attention and research directed at this crucial period of transformation and development of Jewish theology between the Testaments.<sup>298</sup> For this present study, this period of theological growth and development among the Jewish people is especially relevant for it is within Second Temple Judaism that Jesus lived and ministered. A common error is assuming that the perspective of the Old Testament authors reflects accurately the historical, cultural, and religious environment of Jesus and His contemporaries. However, studying Second Temple Judaism demonstrates that significant developments took place that must be explored to accurately the world in which Jesus lived and ministered.<sup>299</sup>

Therefore, before addressing the New Testament text and the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth concerning Yahweh as His Father and the Father of all Christians, this significant

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<sup>298</sup> The historical, cultural, theological, and literary work being done on this topic is extensive. For an introduction to this field of study and some helpful works, see the following: Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period: Belief and Practice from the Exile to Yavneh* (London: Routledge, 2000); Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Boston: Brill, 2014); David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007); Brad Embry, Ronald Herms, and Archie T. Wright, eds., *Early Jewish Literature: An Anthology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018); John Joseph Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010); John Joseph Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, *Early Judaism: A Comprehensive Overview* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012); Jonathan Trotter, *The Jerusalem Temple in Diaspora: Jewish Practice and Thought During the Second Temple Period* (Boston: BRILL, 2019).

<sup>299</sup> This is another significant area of research that deserves much more direct attention than this dissertation can give. For a few resources to explore this idea further, see the following: N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2019); Donald E. Gowan, *Bridge Between the Testaments: A Reappraisal of Judaism from the Exile to the Birth of Christianity* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1986); Mark Adam Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jew: The First Generation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Jacob Neusner, *Judaism When Christianity Began: A Survey of Belief and Practice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

period in Jewish history will first be addressed. It is important to note that this detailed treatment of selected pertinent Second Temple Jewish literature is not meant to view them as authoritative Christian texts or to assume that they rival the authority and inspiration of the Old Testament text. Rather, the aim is to understand how ancient Judaism developed during this period. As N.T. Wright noted, to understand the historical, cultural, religious, and literary background of Second Temple Jews in the New Testament, it is essential to approach them “as closely as possible in the way their first authors and readers would have understood them.”<sup>300</sup> Therefore, what follows in this present chapter is a survey of key Second Temple Jewish literature including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha with a special focus on the key historical, cultural, religious, and literary background of Second Temple Judaism concerning their perspective of Yahweh as Father.

### **Survey of God as Father in Second Temple Judaism**

The question that arises is whether Jesus’ use of Abba language for Yahweh was a radical departure from Old Testament usage or rather, if it was an expected development of an Old Testament theme. While this question will be explored further in the next section, a significant piece of theological and historical background to be addressed first is the pertinent material from Second Temple Judaism.<sup>301</sup> Alongside the Jewish Scriptures, relevant texts and material from Second Temple Judaism provide the most important background information for understanding whether Jesus’ presentation of Yahweh as Abba Father was a common theological perception of

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<sup>300</sup> Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Mason, eds., *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 14.

<sup>301</sup> For a detailed and extensive study that addresses this issue at length, see: Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

God during the intertestamental period and the first-century or whether His views were as novel as some scholars and this study posit.<sup>302</sup>

There is a growing opinion among scholars that both the theology of the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism emphasized and prioritized an understanding of Yahweh as Father than previously thought. For example, Marianne Thompson represents this view of affirming the continuity between the New and Old Testament presentations of God as Father as well as that of Second Temple Judaism against a stricter and more rigid dichotomy,

For although biblical scholars and theologians alike have sought to emphasize the differences between Jesus' view of God and his Jewish context, important lines of continuity run not only from the Old Testament to the New Testament but also from the Old Testament through Second Temple Judaism, to Jesus and the New Testament.<sup>303</sup>

Thus, not all scholars are in agreement with Jeremias regarding the originality of Christ's address of Yahweh as Abba Father. In the next chapter, these two views will be presented more fully. For now, it is helpful to have a theological awareness that there is not unanimous agreement among scholars regarding the continuity and or discontinuity between the two Testaments in relation to Father language for Yahweh. What is undeniable is that the New Testament takes a minor theme in the Old Testament and elevates it to one of utmost significance. Thompson, who was quoted above affirming the continuity between the Testaments also concludes,

Still, it is unwise to exaggerate the number of passages that present God as Father. The relative infrequency of the term 'Father' for God does contrast sharply with the regular use of the term in the New Testament. But the scarcity of the term as over against the

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<sup>302</sup> Texts that speak of God as the Father of an individual or portray an individual addressing God as Father include Wis. 2:16; 14:3; Sir. 23:1, 4; 51: 10; *3 Macc.* 6:3, 8; *Jub.* 19:29; 4Q460 5 I, 5; 4Q382 55 II, 1–9; 4Q379 6 I, 1–7; *Jos. Asen.* 12: 8–15. Texts that speak of God as the Father of the nation include 1 Chr. 29:10 (LXX); Tob. 13:4; Wis. 11:10; 1QH IX, 35; *Ant.* 2.6.8; *3 Macc.* 2:21; 5:7; 7:6; *Jub.* 1:25, 28; *Apocr. Ezek.* fragment 2. Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 48.

<sup>303</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 40.



New Testament does not signal radical discontinuity with the presentation of God in the Old Testament.<sup>304</sup>

Between the two Testaments, Second Temple Judaism provides an invaluable insight into the theological state of the Jews just before and contemporary to the life and ministry of Jesus. For this reason, it adds a wealth of insight to the present discussion and will be evaluated here before moving to the New Testament material.

### *Tobit*

The first example comes from the Apocrypha and is a quotation from the book of Tobit. Tobit was most likely written between 250 and 175 BCE and therefore represents an important text from before the time of Christ.<sup>305</sup> The context is a joyous prayer of praise to God<sup>306</sup> where Tobit exclaims, “Even there he has shown you his greatness. Therefore exalt him in the presence of every living being, Because he is our Lord, and he is our God. He is our Father, and he is God forever” (Tobit 13:4).<sup>307</sup> This text demonstrates that the theme of Yahweh as Israel’s Father continued in the Second Temple period. This usage is in continuity with what has been stated concerning each Old Testament usage. Once again, Yahweh is the corporate and collective Father of Israel and He is addressed as such, not in a direct or personal manner. When Jeremias claims that there is nothing in the Old Testament or Second Temple literature that resembles Jesus’ approach to God as Abba, this is what He refers to. Yahweh is always addressed

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<sup>304</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 39.

<sup>305</sup> David A. DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 69.

<sup>306</sup> R. J. Littman, *Septuagint Commentary Series, Volume Tobit: The Book of Tobit in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden: Brill, 2008),

<sup>307</sup> Carey A. Moore, *Tobit: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1996), 275–287.

corporately as the covenant Father of Israel and not directly or personally as Jesus would instruct Christians to do.<sup>308</sup>

### *3 Maccabees*

There are a few significant instances in 3 Maccabees of the author addressing Yahweh as Father. The dating of the text is difficult to confirm definitively with a probable range between 217 BCE and 37-41 CE,<sup>309</sup> however, it was very likely written around 100 BCE.<sup>310</sup> While 3 Maccabees is significant for developing a thorough understanding of theology in the Second Temple period, Jeremias notes that it should not be used as evidence that Father language was widespread<sup>311</sup> because it was written in Greek, not Hebrew or Aramaic, and it was written outside of Palestine.<sup>312</sup> While this is a useful assertion and is helpful in noting which texts carry the most theological significance, 3 Maccabees does offer significant insight into Second Temple Judaism.<sup>313</sup> Each of the instances of Father language used for Yahweh in 3 Maccabees will be provided to show the primary material with only a brief comment.

The first example comes from chapter 2, “Then the God who watches over all things, the first father of all, holy among the holy ones, heard this lawful prayer and scourged the one who

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<sup>308</sup> For further information on Tobit and other Apocryphal literature, see: Gerald West, John Jarick and Lester L. Grabbe, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Judith, Greek Esther, Tobit* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2021); Irene Nowell, *Jonah, Tobit, Judith: Volume 25* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015).

<sup>309</sup> Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page Jr., and Matthew J. M. Coomber, *The Apocrypha: Fortress Commentary on the Bible* (Lanham: 1517 Media, 2016), 241.

<sup>310</sup> DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 278.

<sup>311</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 27.

<sup>312</sup> DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 277.

<sup>313</sup> For further information on 3 Maccabees and other literature outside of the Old Testament, see: Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2013).

had claimed too much for himself in his violence and arrogance” (3 Maccabees 2:21 CEB). Interestingly, Father is used here in two distinct manners from the general witness of the Old Testament text. First, in the Old Testament, every reference to Yahweh as Father is always connected to Israel and His covenant with them. Here, however, the author of 3 Maccabees appeals to Yahweh as “the first father of all” with undertones of Yahweh as the creator and progenitor of all peoples which is foreign to the theological presentation of the Old Testament.

Thompson comments on this,

The emphasis on ‘all’ and on God as ‘first Father’ gives some clue to the polemical edge of these claims. The emphasis on the universal scope of God's Fatherhood and sovereignty are features of Jewish monotheistic polemic. Inasmuch as Zeus is routinely referred to as ‘father of gods and mortals,’ the reference to Israel's God as the ‘first Father of all’ scores a point for the uniqueness of Israel's God.<sup>314</sup>

Thus, while Father is used here for Yahweh, it is done so in a distinct fashion from the previous material surveyed. A second theological difference is that here in Maccabees, the connection between Yahweh as Father because He is creator is also a concept not found or at least appealed to in the biblical text.<sup>315</sup> Once again, in a way that draws distinction between Israel and their ANE counterparts, the biblical authors were cautious to not connect Yahweh’s role as the creator with His identity as the covenant Father of Israel. It is true according to the biblical witness that Yahweh is both Father and creator. However, the biblical authors did not link these two concepts together apart from Yahweh’s covenant with His people and His creation and formation of Israel by electing them in love and rescuing them from Egypt. Thus, while 3 Maccabees does employ the title Father for Yahweh, it does so in a dissimilar way.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 49-50.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> For a detailed exegetical analysis of this, see: Charles M. Mead, “The Fatherhood of God.” *The American Journal of Theology* 1, no. 3 (1897): 577–600.

3 Maccabees 6 contains two references to Yahweh as Father and one to Israel as His children. These two direct addresses to Yahweh as Father appear in verses 3 and 8: “Look upon the descendants of Abraham, upon the children of sacred Jacob, father, a people set apart as your inheritance, who are strangers perishing in a strange land” (3 Maccabees 6:3 CEB); “And you, Father, looked upon Jonah, when he was wasting away in the belly of a sea monster from the depths, and you restored him unharmed to all his family” (3 Maccabees 6:8 CEB). It is significant to note that this prayer made by Eleazar “calls to mind a standard Jewish daily prayer known as the Amidah, the opening of which also appeals to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and recounts the saving acts of God in history.”<sup>317</sup> The theme and content of the prayer generally aligns with biblical tradition and specifically the “basic Deuteronomic sin/punishment/repentance-deliverance theology found in some biblical texts.”<sup>318</sup> What is of importance here are the two references to Yahweh as Father. There is nothing necessarily novel or noteworthy about these examples when compared to Old Testament usage. Here, Yahweh’s role as Israel’s Father is directly tied to His covenant with them and His relationship with their ancestors. Just as in the Old Testament text, Yahweh is the corporate Father of Israel, and His relationship with them is based on His election, covenant, and rescue of them.<sup>319</sup>

Significant here for this study, especially in relation to Jesus’ usage in the Gospels is that the prayer appeals to Yahweh directly as Father in a rather reminiscent manner to the Gospels. However, a few comments must be made which affirm the novelty and significant development made by Jesus of a rather obscure theme from the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism.

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<sup>317</sup> Yee, Page, and Coomber, *The Apocrypha*, 244.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> For further discussion of this prayer in 3 Maccabees, see: DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 289-290.

Here, it is the Greek *πάτερ*, and not the Aramaic *Abba* as employed by Jesus. The theological significance of this distinction will be explored at length in the upcoming section. Second, this is not a prayer to be prayed by the masses as a template for prayer or one made by an individual. Rather, it is “a priestly intercessory prayer for the whole nation.”<sup>320</sup> Thus, while in continuation with the theology of the Old Testament, this usage in the Second Temple period does not develop a theology of Yahweh as Father or prepare the Jewish audience for the transformation of this idea by Christ.

In 3 Maccabees 6:28, the author alludes to Yahweh as the Father to Israel by calling Israel the “children of the almighty,” “Free the children of the almighty, living God of heaven, who from the days of our ancestors until now has given our kingdom constant and notable stability” (3 Maccabees 6:28 CEB). This is a standard usage and reflects the general perspective of the Old Testament. The perception of Israel as the children of Yahweh corporately appeals to the Old Testament perspective and remains distinct from Jesus’ development of this theme in the Gospels.

The final example comes from 3 Maccabees 6:28. This usage is a metaphor of Yahweh defending the Jews as a father for His children, “...Because we have learned that the heavenly God surely shields the Jews and fights alongside them as a father for his children...” (3 Maccabees 6:28 NRSVUE). This usage reflects the Old Testament theological understanding of Yahweh’s love and providential care for Israel being like that of a Father. However, this occurrence not only celebrates Yahweh’s care for His people, but in a more intense and striking manner, it draws a strong distinction between the Jewish people and their Gentile contemporaries. As DeSilva notes, “At the close of the tale, Ptolemy is brought to confess not

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<sup>320</sup> Stefan Szymik, “Jesus’ Intitulation of God as *Abba*: Its Sources and Impact on the Idea of the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament.” *Verbum Vitae*, 38 (2), 2020, 485–502.

God's paternal love for all people but rather that 'the God of heaven surely defends the Jews, always taking their part as a father does for his children.'"<sup>321</sup> While the Old Testament celebrates Yahweh's covenant and electing love of Israel through their recognition of Him as Father, the author of 3 Maccabees uses this as a polemical image against the Gentiles through his appeal to the Jews' unique place as God's covenant children. This stark polemicizing of the divine Fatherhood of Yahweh is unique to 3 Maccabees and not present in the Old Testament text or in Jesus' teaching.

### *Wisdom of Solomon*

The Wisdom of Solomon is another Jewish text written in Greek by what appears to be a Hellenized Jew residing in Alexandria.<sup>322</sup> Thus, while the examples from this text are significant for reconstructing the theological milieu of the Second Temple period, it is not as influential in the discussion concerning Jesus' use of Abba in the New Testament as texts written in Hebrew and or from within Palestine. The first group of references to either Yahweh as Father or to Israel or individuals as His children come from chapter two. In an 'apocalyptic reconfiguration of the court tale,'<sup>323</sup> the contrast between the righteous and the ungodly is explored. It is significant that in 2:16, a claim is made against the ungodly that the righteous man "boasts that God is his father." In 2:13, the charge is made that the righteous man "professes to have knowledge of God and calls himself a child of the Lord." Finally, in a text that has often been understood in a Messianic way by early Christian interpreters (including Ambrose and Cyril of Alexandria) or to a specific righteous person or priest at the time,<sup>324</sup> his enemies taunt him concerning his status as

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<sup>321</sup> DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 288.

<sup>322</sup> Yee, Page, and Coomber, *The Apocrypha*, 128.

<sup>323</sup> DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 127.

<sup>324</sup> Yee, Page, and Coomber, *The Apocrypha*, 128.

a child of God, saying, “Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life, for if the righteous man is God’s child, he will help him and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries” (Wisdom of Solomon 2:17-18 NRSVUE).<sup>325</sup>

These three examples are relevant for although written outside of Palestine and in Greek, they represent a developing understanding by the Jewish people that they were Yahweh’s children in distinction from their pagan neighbors. Does this mean that Jesus’ usage of Abba in relation to Yahweh as His Father and the Father of his disciples was not new but rather a continuation of Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish theology? To begin, while the evidence against Jeremias’ claims and that of this study that Jesus’ usage of Abba was a significant development is not overwhelming or definitive, as Richard Bauckham noted it is “A little more impressive, when assembled, than Jeremias seems to admit.”<sup>326</sup> Thus, this information cannot be ignored. If it is to be proven that Jesus’ use of Abba as a direct address to Yahweh and its continued practice in the primitive church was a significant if not exceptional development, then this material must be treated.

The usages in the Wisdom of Solomon and in the following Second Temple examples stand in theological alignment with the Old Testament yet fall short of the developing picture of Christ in the New Testament regarding Yahweh as Father. First, rather than a general usage common among all Jewish people, the references in Wisdom of Solomon 2:16 and 2:18 are “Probably a democratization of one of the titles of the Israelite king (Psalm 2:7; 89:20, 26–

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<sup>325</sup> “This apocalyptic court tale, moreover, reconfigures the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah (Isa. 52:13–53:12). In both, the righteous protagonist is depicted as a child of God (Wis. 2:13, 16, 18; Isa. 53:2) who bears himself gently in the face of marginalization and death (Wis. 2:19–20; Isa. 53:7–9). - DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 127.

<sup>326</sup> Richard Bauckham, “The Sonship of the Historical Jesus in Christology,” *SJT* 31 (1978): 249.

27).”<sup>327</sup> This is demonstrated by the New Testament’s reference to this text in Matthew 27:43 where it is applied directly to Jesus Himself, the messianic fulfillment of the Old Testament kingship and the ultimate righteous sufferer.<sup>328</sup> Thus, it is the righteous man’s understanding of his connection to Old Testament promises of Yahweh’s paternal care for the suffering that underlies the theology of this text. Second, Yahweh’s role as Father, like in the Old Testament, is directly tied to His covenant with Israel and their subsequent righteous actions in response. Whereas Jesus’ employment of Abba in the New Testament signifies disciples’ intimacy and access to Yahweh as their Father, the Old Testament and Second Temple period texts “Characterize God as Father in relationship to the faithful, specifically in terms of God’s care, mercy, love, discipline, and the obedience that is owed in turn.”<sup>329</sup> Thus, these references appeal to Yahweh’s promises of paternal care to the kingship and to the righteous who are obedient to His covenant. While demonstrating that Yahweh as a Father to Israel is a theological concept in the Old Testament and Second Temple material, the reality still remains as argued by Jeremias that all of these texts “lack a direct individual address to God as Father”<sup>330</sup> in any way which matches the New Testament material.

The final examples from the Wisdom of Solomon come from 11:10 and 14:3. In 11:10, the Lord’s testing of Israel is compared to that of a “father.” This is reminiscent of classic biblical imagery that coincides with that of the Old Testament. In 14:3, the author provides one of the only instances of a direct address to Yahweh as Father in the vocative form, “But it is your

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<sup>327</sup> A. Peter Hayman, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Wisdom of Solomon* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2021), 32-33.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 53.

<sup>330</sup> Szymik, *Jesus’ Intitulation of God as Abba*, 489.



providence, O Father (πατήρ), that steers its course, because you have given it a path in the sea and a safe way through the waves.” (Wisdom of Solomon 14:3 NSRVUE) This is especially significant for this type of direct address of Yahweh as Father is one of the hallmarks of Christ’s usage of Abba and πατήρ in the Gospels. A few comments must be made.

First, while this is one of the only direct references to Yahweh as Father in all of the Second Temple period literature, the author does not claim personal sonship to Yahweh but rather addresses Him generally as Father. As the subsequent section will demonstrate, this differs greatly from the New Testament instances in the life and ministry of Jesus. Second, as with every other example, the word employed here is πατήρ, not Abba, which still signifies that there is no other example in any Jewish literature whether canonical or non-canonical of anyone addressing Yahweh as Abba in Aramaic as Jesus did. Finally, this usage comes from outside of Palestine and is written in Greek and thus is not as decisive for this study. Therefore, while this is a significant example and demonstrates once again that the fatherhood of Yahweh was a concept in the Second Temple period, Jeremias’ claim still stands that, “There is yet no evidence in the literature of ancient Palestinian Judaism that ‘my Father’ is used as a personal address to God.”<sup>331</sup> Thus, Christ’s usage of Abba Father personally and His instruction for His disciples to do the same still stands unparalleled in all of the Jewish literature.

### *Sirach*

The next significant illustration of Father language used for God is found in the Apocryphal text, Wisdom of Ben Sira. This text is especially relevant to this study for it was written by Yeshua Ben Sira, a scribe living and teaching in Jerusalem, and writing originally in

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<sup>331</sup> Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 29.

Hebrew before being translated to Greek.<sup>332</sup> The dating of the text suggests that Ben Sira completed his work in the 180s and his grandson translated the book from Hebrew to Greek after 132 BCE, “the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Euergetes” (prologue).<sup>333</sup> For this reason, it is especially insightful and determinative for understanding the theology of the Second Temple Jews and their usage of Father language for Yahweh. Three references will be explored here. The first two come from chapter 23, “O Lord, Father and Master of my life, do not abandon me to their designs, and do not let me fall among them!... O Lord, Father and God of my life, do not give me haughty eyes” (Sirach 23:1, 4 NRSVUE). These examples are striking for this study because the author of the text appears to be employing an approach to Yahweh that never appears in the Old Testament.<sup>334</sup> Whereas in the Old Testament as has been studied in depth, Yahweh is always addressed as the covenant Father of Israel, here in Sirach, in the Greek text, Yahweh is addressed directly as Father. This direct address of Yahweh as Father personally in the text “Manifests the filial confidence with which the faithful are to pray and their willingness to obey the commandments.”<sup>335</sup> This quotation, if accurate to the original Hebrew of the text, has considerable implications for this study. Could it be that this represents a pious Jew addressing Yahweh directly as his Father before the arrival of Jesus? If so, this is one of the only examples of this in all of the Jewish literature.

Some scholars see a significant resemblance between the material in Sirach and the teaching of Jesus:

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<sup>332</sup> DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 142.

<sup>333</sup> Yee, Page, and Coomber, *The Apocrypha*, 148.

<sup>334</sup> Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 67.

<sup>335</sup> Skehan W. Patrick, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes* (New Haven & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1987), 262–326.

The parallels between Ben Sira and the sayings of Jesus preserved in Matthew and Luke are so striking and numerous as to render it certain that Jesus Ben Joseph knew and valued some of the sayings that had originated with Jesus Ben Sira. The sayings and instructions that Matthew compiled in the Sermon on the Mount contain numerous points of connection.<sup>336</sup>

While there are a variety of examples of potential parallels between Jesus' teaching and the material in Sirach,<sup>337</sup> what is of most interest here is Ben Sira's address to Yahweh as Father. If it can be proven that Ben Sira addressed Yahweh directly as Father, this would have significant theological ramifications for the subsequent research on Jesus' example of the same which up to this point has been widely agreed upon as having been novel and noteworthy for His time. For example, DeSilva emphasizes this connection between Jesus Ben Sira and Jesus Ben Joseph noting that, "Both address God as Father in prayer (Sir. 23:1, 4; Matt. 6:9)."<sup>338</sup> Is this connection definitive then? If so, as some scholars have emphasized against Jeremias, it would question his claims concerning the novelty and significant development of Christ's use of Father language for God. While Sirach represents an important text for this discussion, there is evidence to suggest that it is not as consequential in disproving Jeremias' claims or in detracting from the originality of Christ's address in the Gospels as it first appears.

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<sup>336</sup> DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 174.

<sup>337</sup> This discussion is beyond the scope of this study. However, for a brief introduction to this issue, DeSilva writes: "Jesus's method of expounding on the law by extending the range of the commandments (e.g., extending the prohibition of murder to include anger and demeaning speech) appears already in Ben Sira, for whom economic oppression is prohibited by the commandment against murder (Sir. 34:25–27). Additionally, Ben Sira had already linked setting aside anger against a neighbor with obedience to the commandments of God (Sir. 28:7; cf. Matt. 5:21–22). Both Ben Sira and Jesus urge giving to the one who asks (Sir. 4:4; Matt. 5:42) and claim that mirroring God's generous love makes one like a child of God (Sir. 4:10; cf. Matt. 5:45). Both warn against vain repetition in prayer (Sir. 7:14; Matt. 6:7); both address God as Father in prayer (Sir. 23:1, 4; Matt. 6:9; cf. James 3:9). One development in Ben Sira is especially arresting. The Jerusalem sage had taught that those who hope for forgiveness from God must not harbor unforgiveness against mortals like themselves. If humans expect God, whose honor is incomparably greater than theirs, to forgive offenses against God's Self, then they must not presume to cherish grudges, or else they will "face the Lord's vengeance" (Sir. 28:1–5; cf. Matt. 6:12, 14–15; 18:23–35)." DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 174.

<sup>338</sup> DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 174.

The most significant point of interest for this debate is what was written in the original Hebrew version of the text by Jesus Ben Sira. The text itself notes in the introduction that it is a Greek translation of the original Hebrew (Sir. 1:15-25). Thus, if the original Hebrew text is consulted, does it affirm that Yahweh is addressed directly as Father? Or, as the popular adage goes, was something lost in translation? The translator himself notes in the introduction that his translation does not fully capture the original meaning of the author as written initially in Hebrew:<sup>339</sup>

You are invited, therefore, to read it with goodwill and attention and to be indulgent in cases where we may seem to have rendered some phrases imperfectly, despite our diligent labor in translating. For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same effect when translated into another language. Not only this book, but even the Law itself, the Prophets, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original. (Sirach 1:15-25 NRSVUE)

This certainly ought to be brought into consideration when this text is used to discredit Jeremias' claims that "There is no evidence so far that anyone addressed God as 'my Father' in Palestinian Judaism of the first millennium."<sup>340</sup> The claim that Sirach's usage of *πατήρ* as a direct address to Yahweh and is the same as Jesus' in the Gospels is based upon a point that rests on the translation, not the original language, when the translator himself notes that the translation does not fully convey the original meaning of the Hebrew. While this alone is enough to question this position, Jeremias discusses this directly with the research and findings of other scholars citing a notable discovery of a Hebrew paraphrase of this passage:<sup>341</sup>

A Hebrew paraphrase of this passage was discovered. Here that address is not 'O Lord, Father' but 'O God of my Father.' It can hardly be doubted that was the wording of the

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<sup>339</sup> This is a significant point that the research of this study has not seen any other scholar address.

<sup>340</sup> Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 67.

<sup>341</sup> For a further and detailed discussion of this, see: Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 29.

address in the original Hebrew text, for the designation of God as ‘God of my father,’ stemming from Exodus 15:2, was widespread and appears elsewhere in Sirach.<sup>342</sup>

Thus, Jeremias’ argumentation concerning this passage rests not merely on the admittedly weak premise that the translation could potentially be flawed, but on explicit evidence that the original Hebrew did not contain a direct address to Yahweh as Father but rather contained the more common phrase, “O God of my Father.”<sup>343</sup>

The third reference to Yahweh as Father in Sirach is in chapter 51:10. The previous discussion was detailed and everything stated above also bears interpretive weight here. In 51:10, depending upon the translation one utilizes, the reverse situation appears.<sup>344</sup> The Greek version of the text reads, “I appealed to the Lord, the Father of my lord, not to forsake me in the days of affliction, at the time when there is no help against the proud.” (Sirach 51:10 RSVCE) Following this rendering, the text has no reference to Yahweh as Father. However, according to the Hebrew version of the text, “אֱבִי אֲתָהּ” can either be rendered as a direct appeal to Yahweh as, “Lord, you are my Father,” or, as the Greek text renders it, “God of my Father.”<sup>345</sup> A significant linguistic parallel to this text is found in Exodus 15:2 where the identical phrase, אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי, is rendered as “my father's God” and not as “God my Father.” While it is possible that this text is a direct reference to God as Father predating this type of usage by Jesus, the evidence is also strong in favor of rendering this as “God of my Father.” Even if this does represent an extremely rare

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<sup>342</sup> Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 67.

<sup>343</sup> Joel Marcus, “A Fifth Ms. Of Ben Sira,” *JQR* 21 (1930-31) 238.

<sup>344</sup> For further treatment on the Wisdom of Ben Sira, see the following works: John Snaith, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Sirach* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2021); Benjamin Wright, *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (Boston: BRILL, 2008); Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia, eds., *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology* (Berlin: De Gruyter Inc., 2008).

<sup>345</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Hebrew here, see: Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 27-29.

direct address to Yahweh as Father in Second Temple Jewish thought, as Jeremias notes, Jesus' employment of Abba in the common dialect of Aramaic still stands out as exceptional for here, "Hebrew is used, the sacred language that was not employed in everyday speech."<sup>346</sup> Thus, even if this phrase should be translated as a direct reference to Yahweh as Father, it is an exceptional and rare usage of this type of language for God, and it still falls short of what Jesus would introduce through His life, teaching, and ministry. Therefore, Jeremias' conclusion still stands that, "To date, nobody has produced one single instance in Palestinian Judaism where God is addressed as 'my Father' by an individual person."<sup>347</sup>

### *Jubilees*

The Apocryphal Book of Jubilees was written around the second half of the second century BCE.<sup>348</sup> A complicating factor to utilizing this book for this present study is that the composition is "preserved in its entirety only in Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic), the traditional language of the Ethiopian Church."<sup>349</sup> The textual evidence shows that the text was originally written in Hebrew, translated from Hebrew into Greek and possibly into Syriac, and then from Greek it was translated into Latin and into Ethiopic.<sup>350</sup> There are three direct references to Yahweh as a Father in Jubilees with other allusions to this calling Israel the children of God. The first examples appear in chapter 1:

Their souls will cleave to me and all my commandments. They will keep my commandments. I will become their father, and they will become my children. They will all be called children of the living God. Every angel and spirit will know them. They will

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<sup>346</sup> Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 67.

<sup>347</sup> Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 67.

<sup>348</sup> James VanderKam, *Book of Jubilees* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2001), 11.

<sup>349</sup> Jonathan Klawans and Lawrence M. Wills eds., *The Jewish Annotated Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 56.

<sup>350</sup> VanderKam, *Book of Jubilees*, 14.

know that they are my children, that I am their father in uprightness and righteousness, and that I love them... The Lord will appear in the sight of all. Everyone will know that he is the god of Israel, the father of all the children of Jacob, and the king upon Mount Zion forever and ever. Zion and Jerusalem will become holy (Jubilees 1:24-25, 28)

These usages are in congruency with the Old Testament portrait of Israel as the corporate children of Yahweh through his electing love, rescue from Egypt, and His covenant with them. Other than demonstrating that the author of Jubilees in their reconstruction of Israel's history continued this theological theme, there is nothing unusual here in relation to the Old Testament. The same can be said for the third usage of Father language for Yahweh. In chapter 19, Abraham blesses Jacob and once again in the context of Yahweh's covenant relationship with His people, he prays for Jacob, "May the Lord God become for you a father and you his firstborn son and people for all time..." (Jubilees 19:29) Therefore, Jubilees represents an Old Testament understanding of Yahweh as covenant Father to Israel and offers no significant development to this theme in the intertestamental period.

#### *God as Father in Qumran Texts*

One of the most significant sources for understanding Second Temple Judaism and tracing the development of the theme of Yahweh's Fatherhood in Jewish conception are various texts from Qumran.<sup>351</sup> As has been demonstrated at length throughout this study, direct addresses of Yahweh as Father are extremely rare if not non-existent in the canonical and Second Temple period Jewish literature. Thus, if a legitimate example can be found in the material from Qumran, while this would represent a significant development in Jewish theology and an extremely noteworthy instance in the literature, it still would leave Jesus' usage of Abba Father for Yahweh

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<sup>351</sup> An insightful, thorough, and foundational study addressing this issue is one by Lutz Doering. His research was invaluable in developing this discussion: Lutz Doering, "God as Father in Texts from Qumran," *The Divine Father. Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*. In *Themes in Biblical Narrative 18*, eds. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 107–135.

as rare and unprecedented. This is important to note for significant Qumran discoveries have taken place after Jeremias published his work which perhaps represents pre-New Testament prayer addressed to Yahweh as Father.

Until recently, the only Qumran text referenced as providing evidence that God was addressed as or thought of as Father by the Qumran community was 1QH IX, 35–36, “Thou art a Father to all the sons of thy truth.”<sup>352</sup> While this text demonstrates that at Qumran they continued the Old Testament understanding of Yahweh as the covenant Father of Israel in a corporate sense of Yahweh’s Fatherhood, it doesn’t signify a notable or noteworthy development of this theme. Thus, based on the material at Qumran, the general agreement among scholars is that as Jeremias argued, there are no examples of Yahweh being addressed directly as Father in the Qumran community. However, some recently discovered material challenges this claim and must be examined before the New Testament material can be treated.

There are two potential direct references to Yahweh as Father in the Qumran literature that have been discovered since Jeremias’ research. The first example comes from 4Q372 1 16, “He called to God the Mighty to save him from their hands and he said, ‘My father, my God, do not abandon me into the hands of the nations.’”<sup>353</sup> This text is a prayer attributed to Joseph and the dating of the original manuscript is debated. Doering claims that this text is palaeographically dated to ca. 50 BCE.<sup>354</sup> Contrary to this view, Szymik affirms concerning this text and the subsequent one to be explored (4Q460: frag. 4,5-6) that “Many scholars regard these texts as

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<sup>352</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 50.

<sup>353</sup> Doering, *The Divine Father*, 126.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.



earlier (pre-Qumranic) and as the evidence of the religious influence of early Judaism on the community at Qumran (ca. the 3rd century BC).<sup>355</sup>

The significant phrase here is “אבי ואלהי,” rendered as “My father and my God.” Once again, this text represents what may be one of the only direct references to Yahweh as Father in any Jewish literature in a form that is reminiscent of Christ’s usage in the Gospels. As Schuller, one of the leading scholars on this text notes, if this text can be proven genuine, then “The significant point is that in the psalm in 4Q372 1, we now have a pre-Christian Palestinian prayer in which God is addressed as father.”<sup>356</sup> This is certainly a groundbreaking discovery that must be incorporated into this discussion. Regarding this specific example, two major points must be made. First, if this represents a direct address of Yahweh as Father in the Jewish material, the language is still Hebrew, and thus “Jesus’ use of the Aramaic term abba is still without parallel.”<sup>357</sup> This is significant for this study seeks to explore the novelty of Jesus’ use of Abba for Yahweh especially in relation to prayer and its theological significance and ramifications. Thus, while there is a potential example in the Qumran material for a prayer addressed to Yahweh directly as Father, this does not detract from the distinctive usage of Abba as a direct address of God by Christ in the Gospels.

A second note concerning this Qumran text is the potential that this does not represent the prayer of an individual, Joseph, but rather, that Joseph represents the northern tribes as a whole and thus, this would not represent an individual addressing Yahweh directly as Father but rather the community doing so as His covenant children. To quote Schuller once again, one of the

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<sup>355</sup> Szymik, *Jesus’ Intitulation of God as Abba*, 490.

<sup>356</sup> Eileen M. Schuller, “The Psalm of 4Q372 1 Within the Context of Second Temple Prayer,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1992): 78.

<sup>357</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 50.



directly in prayer in Hebrew, there is nothing that would have prepared the Jewish audience for Christ's employment of the Aramaic אבא for Yahweh.<sup>363</sup> A second important point to be made is that in this text, "The identity of the speaker is unclear."<sup>364</sup> Based upon other fragments of this manuscript, it could refer to one of the patriarchs, for example, Judah (cf. 7 5).<sup>365</sup> Or it could be a reference to the kingdom of Judah, "in which case the prayers and addresses would be uttered by some king(s) or perhaps even a prophet."<sup>366</sup> This too is a crucial point for the discussion here. Once again, what appears at first glance as a direct reference to Yahweh as Father by an individual is once again in question. There is strong evidence regarding this text that either it is placed in the mouth of one of the patriarchs and not an individual Israelite or it is employed by a king or prophet which while significant, would still be representative of a rather rare usage, not a prayer made by an ordinary person. This means that Christ's language for Yahweh in the Gospels is really without parallel in the entirety of the Old Testament and all of the Second Temple period Jewish literature.<sup>367</sup> Thus, to conclude with Doering, it must be noted that,

God's 'fatherhood' is not a major theme in the texts from Qumran. It needs to be related to other, quantitatively more prevalent modes of speaking about God. At the same time, it does have its distinct place in this context. In addition, the evidence for God as 'father' at Qumran is qualitatively important in a number of respects. In its semantic and pragmatic

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<sup>363</sup> For a study that covers all of this material yet comes to slightly different conclusions than those presented here, see: Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Abba and 'Father': Imperial Theology and the Jesus Traditions," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 4 (1992): 618-619.

<sup>364</sup> Doering, *The Divine Father*, 129.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>366</sup> Erik Larson, "460. 4QNarrative Work and Prayer", in: S.J. Pfann et al., *Qumran Cave 4: Cryptic Texts and Miscellanea vol. 1 (DJD 36)*, Oxford 2000, 369–386.

<sup>367</sup> This survey has been nowhere near exhaustive. However, the most significant examples from the Qumran literature has been at least commented on. The complexity of this task is summarized by Schuller writing, "Unfortunately, there is as yet no comprehensive study of all the available Second Temple prayer material, although a start has been made in the survey essays of J. Charlesworth, "A Prolegomenon to a New Study of the Jewish Background of the Hymns and Prayers in the New Testament," *JJS* 33 (1982) 265-85; and D. Flusser, "Psalms, Hymns and Prayers," In *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. M. E. Stone (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 551-78; Schuller, *The Psalm of 4Q372 1 Within the Context of Second Temple Prayer*, 67–79.

features, therefore, it enriches and nuances the profile provided by other relevant texts within Second Temple Judaism.<sup>368</sup>

*Final Texts (Joseph & Aseneth, Apocryphon of Ezekiel, Josephus' Antiquities, Testament of Job)*

While nowhere near exhaustive, the primary Second Temple Jewish texts have been surveyed here in an attempt to reconstruct a thorough understanding of the Jewish theology of Yahweh as Father.<sup>369</sup> A few final texts will be addressed with brief comments. The first is from the Pseudepigrapha; Joseph & Aseneth.<sup>370</sup> It is generally agreed upon that the date of its original composition is somewhere in the first century BCE or first century CE.<sup>371</sup> In 12:8-12, there is a prayer of Aseneth where two times she places her faith in Joseph's God and compares Yahweh's loving care and compassion to that of a father,<sup>372</sup> "And do thou, O Lord, stretch forth thy hands over me, As a father that loves his children and is tenderly affectionate, And snatch me from the hand of my enemy... For thou art the father of the orphans, and the champion of the persecuted..." This reflects an Old Testament perspective of Yahweh as Father and contains no noteworthy developments of this theme.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Doering, *The Divine Father*, 132.

<sup>369</sup> For further study on the significant Jewish literature from the Second Temple period in relation to Yahweh as Father, see an insightful work: Émile Puech, "Dieu Le Père Dans Les Écrits Pér Testamentaires Et Les Manuscrits De La Mer Morte." *Revue De Qumrân* 20, No. 2 (78) (2001): 287–310.

<sup>370</sup> For an introduction to the Pseudepigrapha, see the following work: Matthias Henze and Liv Ingeborg Lied, eds., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Fifty Years of the Pseudepigrapha Section at the SBL* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019).

<sup>371</sup> Susan Docherty, *The Jewish Pseudepigrapha: An Introduction to the Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2015), 40.

<sup>372</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, *Introducing the Pseudepigrapha of Second Temple Judaism: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 56.

<sup>373</sup> For detailed treatment of Joseph & Aseneth, see the following works: Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt: The Composition of a Jewish Narrative* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2020); Edith M. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000).

Another reference in the Pseudepigraphic literature is a brief reference in the Apocryphon of Ezekiel, sometimes referred to as Second Ezekiel.<sup>374</sup> While there seem to be some genuine Jewish portions of these fragments, there are also clear Christian interpolations by what appears to be a Christian editor.<sup>375</sup> There is a direct reference to Jesus Christ and the theology appears to be influenced by Christian theology. Fragment two contains the following reference to Yahweh as Father, “Repent, house of Israel, from your lawless ways. I say to you, my people, Even if the list of your sins stretches from heaven to earth, and if they are as black as they can be, and you turn to me, and with all of your heart say, ‘Father’, I will forgive you, and look on you as holy.” Thus, while this is an interesting example, the high likelihood of theological interpolation, lack of textual witness, and potential late date mean that this text should not be interpreted as determinative for reconstructing a genuine Jewish theology of Yahweh as Father in this period.<sup>376</sup>

In Josephus’ *Antiquities*, Josephus makes a reference to God as “the father of all” (*Ant.* 2.6.8).<sup>377</sup> He also refers to God as the Father of Israel, “Lord and Father of the Hebrew race” (*Ant.* 5.93). Josephus’ employment of Fatherhood language for God represents a divergence from the classic biblical conception of Yahweh as covenant Father of Israel for Josephus will apply this title to Yahweh universally as “father and source of the universe, as creator of things human and divine” (*Ant.* 7.380; 4.262).<sup>378</sup> He refers to Yahweh as “the Father of all” (*Ant.* 1.230; 2.152),

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<sup>374</sup> John Strugnell and Devorah Dimant, “‘4Q’ Second Ezekiel.” *Revue de Qumrân* 13, no. 1/4 (49/52) (1988): 45–58.

<sup>375</sup> James H. Charlesworth, P. Dykers, and M. J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research, with a Supplement* (Chico: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1981), 109-110.

<sup>376</sup> For further treatment of this text, see: Lee Martin McDonald and James H. Charlesworth, eds., *Non-Canonical Religious Texts in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014); James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983).

<sup>377</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 48

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

and the “universal Father who beholds all things” (*Ant.* 1.20). Thus, once again, this type of usage is distinct from the traditional biblical picture for, “In such epithets, Josephus echoes the Homeric characterization of Zeus as ‘father of gods and human beings’ (e.g., *Iliad*, 15.47), rather than the more typical Old Testament designation of God as the Father of Israel or the Father of the righteous.”<sup>379</sup>

Finally, the last Second Temple period Jewish work to be addressed is the *Testament of Job*. This is a late work most likely produced by an Egyptian Jew in the first century CE after the time of Christ.<sup>380</sup> There are a number of places in the *Testament of Job* where Yahweh is referenced as a Father (33:3, 9; 40:3; 47:11; 50:3; 52:9) and as the “living and just creator of all things (2:4; 37:2; 43:13).”<sup>381</sup> However, as Spittler notes, “The judgement of scholars is divided on whether the Apocryphon was Jewish or Christian in origin.”<sup>382</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether these addresses of Yahweh as Father are genuine Jewish examples or Christian interpolations.<sup>383</sup> Therefore, while the *Testament of Job* may be a further example of Jewish prayer addressed to Yahweh as Father, the evidence is too inconclusive and thus cannot be appealed to definitively in either direction.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 52.

<sup>380</sup> Gurtner, *Introducing the Pseudepigrapha of Second Temple Judaism*, 1397c.

<sup>381</sup> Russell P. Spittler, “Testament of Job.” OTP 1:829–68.

<sup>382</sup> Russell P. Spittler and Marinus de Jonge, “The Testament of Job.” Chapter. In *Outside the Old Testament*, 231–248. Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 232-233.

<sup>383</sup> For further discussion of the Jewish and Christian relationship of the *Testament of Job*, see: Nicholas List, “Jewish and Christian ‘Signature Features’ in the Testament of Job.” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 33(1), 51-74.

<sup>384</sup> For further research concerning this text, see: Maria Haralambakis, *The Testament of Job: Text, Narrative and Reception History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014); Michael A. Knibb and Pieter W. Van Der Horst, eds. *Studies on the Testament of Job: Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

## **Conclusion: Summary of God as Father in Second Temple Judaism**

The central topic of this dissertation is exploring Jesus' use of Abba Father as a direct address for Yahweh personally and the implications this has for His theology as a whole and specifically for understanding New Testament Christian prayer and His instruction for His disciples to do the same. It is not merely Father language that is significant but Christ's employment of the Aramaic Abba for Yahweh within the first-century Jewish context. The last two chapters have sought to examine both the Old Testament text and the theology of Second Temple Judaism to investigate whether Jesus' use was normative for His time or whether it was novel and groundbreaking. The primary material has been examined in an attempt to test Jeremias' claims that, "In the literature of Palestinian Judaism no evidence has yet been found of 'my Father' being used by an individual as an address to God. For Jesus to address God as 'my Father' is therefore something new."<sup>385</sup>

Having examined both the Old Testament text and the Second Temple Jewish literature, is this statement true? As the next chapter will illustrate, there is a variance of opinions and conclusions on this topic. However, there are a few summary statements that can be made where the majority of scholars are in agreement. First, in congruence with the theological portrait of Yahweh as a Father to Israel in the Old Testament, "There is evidence in Second Temple Judaism that God was thought of and addressed as the Father of the faithful, whether the faithful be construed as Israel or as the righteous individual within Israel."<sup>386</sup> The claim that there is no evidence within Second Temple Judaism that the Jews understood themselves as the children of Yahweh can clearly be discredited by the material surveyed. However, this is not Jeremias' claim

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<sup>385</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57.

<sup>386</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 53.

nor is it the primary theme of this dissertation. Rather, the question first is whether or not Jews ever understood themselves individually as children of Yahweh and if they addressed Him personally and with such confidence as their Father.

Here is where there is a division among scholars based on the Second Temple Jewish literature surveyed. Contrary to Jeremias' claims, some post that, "Some of these texts do indicate that individuals understood the Fatherhood of God in a personal way, rather than a 'corporate' way."<sup>387</sup> Continuing this line of thinking, Thompson continues, "As Father, God is understood to exercise mercy and discipline toward his children, whom he also cares for and delivers. Typically, then, God is addressed as Father in petitions when people are in peril or need."<sup>388</sup> If this position can be proven, then it certainly calls into question Jeremias' assertions concerning the novelty of direct addresses made by Jesus for Yahweh as Father. However, Jeremias is not alone in His contention that Second Temple Judaism does not provide sufficient evidence that any Jews made direct prayers or addresses to Yahweh as their personal Father. As Szymik argues in reference to the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period and the entirety of the Old Testament, "These texts lack a direct individual address to God as Father. Moreover, they show God as distant and sublime, dwelling in his magnificent heavenly glory."<sup>389</sup> Thus, there is no universal agreement on how the Jewish material ought to be interpreted and understood.

A few final thoughts will be provided here. First, even if the very few potential references to Yahweh as Father are genuine representations of this kind of understanding of Yahweh as the

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<sup>387</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 53.

<sup>388</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 54.

<sup>389</sup> Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba*, 489.



personal Father of individual Jews and able to be approached as such, this certainly was not the primary nor common theological persuasion of Jews during this period. The fact that there is detailed exegesis of these texts and still a contention regarding the findings represents the non-decisive nature of the material available. Therefore, the few potential examples of Yahweh addressed directly as Father by Second Temple Jews represent a rare and minority usage by Jews during the period. This is true of the Old Testament text as well as was addressed in the preceding chapter. Second, Jeremias' primary claim remains unchallenged that there is no evidence nor examples in any of the Old Testament nor Jewish material for anyone ever addressing Yahweh with the personal and intimate Aramaic term Abba,

We can say quite definitely that there is no analogy at all in the whole literature of Jewish prayer for God being addressed as Abba. This assertion applies not only to fixed liturgical prayer, but also to free prayer, of which many examples have been handed down to us in Talmudic literature. We are thus confronted with a fact of the utmost significance. Whereas there is not a single instance of God being addressed as Abba in the literature of Jewish prayer, Jesus always addressed him in this way.<sup>390</sup>

None of the texts addressed here or from the Old Testament or Second Temple period ever address Yahweh as Abba. Jeremias is uncontested here by any textual evidence or argumentation by scholars on this point.

Thus, against the Old Testament and Jewish background, Jesus' use of Abba is exceptionally novel and unprecedented for any of His predecessors or contemporaries. In addition to this, Jesus' direct address of Yahweh as Abba Father and His instruction for His disciples to approach Him with such unparalleled intimacy and access is also a divergence from the classic Jewish theological approach to God. Therefore, in both respects, Jesus is employing an unparalleled and unprecedented approach to Yahweh as Abba Father which is foundational to the theology of the New Testament and one of the distinctive marks between Judaism and the

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<sup>390</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57.

Christian religion. This is the subject of the next chapter building upon the historical, cultural, literary, and theological foundations of the Old Testament and Second Temple literature.

## Chapter 5: Jesus of Nazareth's Unprecedented Approach to God as Abba Father

### Introduction: Jesus of Nazareth's Unprecedented Approach to God as Abba Father

When Jesus of Nazareth addressed Yahweh intimately, personally, and directly as Abba Father (Αββα ὁ πατήρ) and instructed His followers to do the same, the Jewish understanding of Yahweh as covenant Father of Israel experienced an unprecedented and unexpected development.<sup>391</sup> The Old Testament text has been treated at length in an attempt to formulate an accurate understanding of the Jewish conception of Yahweh as Father in relation to Israel. What has emerged is the consensus that though Father was not a common designation for Yahweh in the Old Testament or for the Jewish people, it was a significant theological theme that developed throughout Yahweh's unfolding history and relationship with His people. A significant theological shift as the New Testament text is approached demonstrated by the preceding exegesis is that there are no examples in the Old Testament or Jewish history of anyone approaching Yahweh personally or individually as Father and especially as Abba (אבא, Αββα).<sup>392</sup>

As was demonstrated in the exegetical survey of every Old Testament direct reference to Yahweh as Father, in every instance, Yahweh was addressed as the corporate covenant Father of Israel as a collective people and never addressed by an individual Jew as their personal Father.<sup>393</sup> The same can be said concerning the Jewish literature from the Second Temple period.<sup>394</sup> This point must be stressed for with the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish understanding of

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<sup>391</sup> Gerhard Kittel. "ἄββᾶ," In Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), TDNT 1:6.

<sup>392</sup> This is Jeremias' primary thesis which has been demonstrated from his various writings. This chapter and those that follow test Jeremias' claims against the Old Testament exegesis presented with the intention of presenting a modern evaluation of his views against the most recent evidence.

<sup>393</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 29.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

Yahweh as covenant Father of Israel experienced an unprecedented and unexpected development.<sup>395</sup> The following exegetical analysis of the New Testament text illustrates the remarkable fact that the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth brought about the proliferation of Father language for Yahweh evident not only in the Gospels but throughout the entirety of the New Testament.<sup>396</sup>

The word “Father” appears on the lips of Jesus in reference to God one hundred and seventy times in the Gospels. Compared to the mere fifteen direct references to Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament, this is a significant and unprecedented development of what was a minor theme in the Old Testament now standing at center stage as one of the most central tenets of New Testament theology. In every instance except one when Jesus addressed the covenant God of the Old Testament directly, He did so by not only calling Him Father generally as the Old Testament authors did but by calling Him “His” personal Father. This did not stop with Jesus, for He taught His disciples to do the same, and the New Testament represents the overwhelming proliferation of Father language for Yahweh. It is possible to argue theologically and exegetically based upon the New Testament text and the Christian religion, as the following research will present, that Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Father is the key to understanding the theology of the New Testament authors.<sup>397</sup>

The New Testament’s theology of God as Father demonstrates the same distinctive nature from its cultural and religious environment as the Old Testament presentation of Yahweh as

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<sup>395</sup> Stefan Szymik, “Jesus’ Intitulation of God As Abba: Its Sources and Impact on the Idea of the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament”. *Verbum Vitae* 38, no. 2 (December 21, 2020): 499.

<sup>396</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 85.

<sup>397</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 63-75.

Father compared with the ANE material and the non-canonical Jewish material surveyed.<sup>398</sup>

There is a great disparity between what the ANE neighbors of Israel and the Jews before and during the New Testament period believed concerning Yahweh as Father when compared with the theology and teaching of Jesus. This is notable for Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Father was not only distinct from the ancient religions of His time but also of His own Jewish people.<sup>399</sup> If this can be proven based upon the exegetical survey that follows, then the significance of Jesus' development and transformation of this Old Testament theme is of the utmost importance for understanding the novelty of the New Covenant and the relationship Christians have through Christ with Yahweh as their Abba Father.

Therefore, continuing on the historical, literary, and theological foundation of chapters two and three, a similar pattern will be followed in chapter five, but this time, considering the New Testament material. To begin, a definition of terms for the Greek and Aramaic words used in reference to God as Father throughout the New Testament will be provided (אבא, πατήρ). Priority will be given to Jesus' teaching concerning God as Father and His direct addresses of Him throughout the Gospels. While the Gospels will be the primary focus, brief consideration will be given as well to other texts throughout the New Testament for a more robust understanding of the usage of these terms throughout.

Fascinatingly, in several places, the New Testament authors veer from writing in Greek (πατήρ) and employ the Aramaic אבא for God. The significance of this usage will be addressed during the period of Christ's life and ministry from a historical, linguistic, and theological point

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<sup>398</sup> This point has been treated at length in the previous chapters and therefore is not treated directly here.

<sup>399</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father," in Alvin F. Kimel, *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992), 131.

of view to better grasp its significance and reception during this period. Jesus' use of Abba as a direct reference for God is an unparalleled and unprecedented development for the Jewish people and represents one of the distinctive elements of His life and ministry that make the New Covenant definitively new. The novelty of Christ's use of this term concerning God and its subsequent usage by the Apostle Paul and the early church merits detailed study not only of this word but its implications for Christians based upon the example and instruction of Christ.

This will be done in two major parts. First, a linguistic and historical analysis of the Aramaic term Abba during the first century will be performed to establish the significant historical background. Second, Jesus' use of Abba will be explored to discern the frequency of His usage and its place in His life and ministry. Then, before addressing the New Testament material itself and primarily the Gospels, a brief section will explore the novelty and significance of Abba as an address for Yahweh against the Jewish background and within the milieu of first-century Palestine.

### **Linguistic and Historical Analysis of Abba Father in the First Century and a Study of Jesus' Use of Abba as an Address for God in His Life and Ministry**

In all four of the Gospel accounts, Jesus always addressed God as "Father" (Matthew 11:25; Mark 14:36; Luke 23:46; John 17:1).<sup>400</sup> In the Synoptic Gospels, when God is called "Father," the word "is always on the lips of Jesus."<sup>401</sup> Not only was Father the distinctive and unique term given to God by Jesus, but there is almost universal scholarly consensus that behind

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<sup>400</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids; Leicester: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 144.

<sup>401</sup> P. Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon Saint Matthieu: Commentaire du Nouveau Testament* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1970).

the Greek πατήρ is the Aramaic ܢܦܘܠ (Mark 14:36),<sup>402</sup> “a term so intimate that few of his contemporaries ever used it to address God.”<sup>403</sup> France clarifies this by noting:

The simple ‘Father’ with which Luke’s version of the prayer begins reflects the Aramaic vocative ‘abbā’ which was Jesus’ distinctive approach to God in prayer (Mt 11:25; 11:25-26) and for the Aramaic term (see Mark 14:36), which his disciples were subsequently privileged to share (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).<sup>404</sup>

Before addressing whether Jesus’ approach to Yahweh as Father was unprecedented in the Jewish religion or was the natural continuation and development of an Old Testament theme, the most distinct element of Jesus’ usage must first be explored, His use of the Aramaic ܢܦܘܠ for God. Second, the question must be asked, is Abba only used in Mark 14:36, or does it stand behind Jesus’ other uses of Father language for Yahweh?

#### *Linguistic and Historical Analysis of Abba Father in the First-Century*

The first task is to define Abba during the first century within Palestine. There is no debate that Abba (ܢܦܘܠ, ἄββα) can be correctly rendered as “father.” This is clear from the biblical usage as well as from other Aramaic texts. The question concerns the connotation and nuance of Abba and how it was employed and understood within the Jewish period and context in which Jesus lived. As will be demonstrated in the subsequent survey, there are two primary means of understanding Abba.<sup>405</sup> There is the classic position that Abba represents the intimate language of children toward their father and though utilized in daily interactions in Jewish families, when used in reference to Yahweh by Jesus, it was a novel and unprecedented representation of

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<sup>402</sup> This view will be explored and defended below.

<sup>403</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, Vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 6:9–13.

<sup>404</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007., 267-270.

<sup>405</sup> Although coming from a different religious background than that of the author of this study, a helpful survey of this issue and a balanced presentation of both general views is the following: Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Why Is Abba in the New Testament?,” *Religious Educator* 6, no. 1 (2005): 43–49.

intimacy and access from a son to a father in the common language of the day.<sup>406</sup> A different understanding of Abba still maintains that it is a more familiar or colloquial term used in reference from a child to their father, but challenges how novel or significant this word is against its Hebrew and Greek counterparts.<sup>407</sup>

Abba (אָבָא) is defined in BADG as, “A term of endearment, later used as title and personal name.”<sup>408</sup> The evidence suggests and there is a general scholarly consensus that Abba began as the childish address of a young child to their father.<sup>409</sup> This is confirmed by the NIDNTT, tracing the development of the term Abba, “In Aramaic ‘abbā’ is originally, like the feminine equivalent ‘immā’, a word derived from baby language (like our ‘dada’).”<sup>410</sup> The fact that this rendering is accurate and reflects the historical validity that the term has its roots in the intimate language of a child is confirmed by the Talmud,<sup>411</sup> in a text stating that, “When a child

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<sup>406</sup> Joachim Jeremias is the scholar most famous for exploring at length and defending this view in a number of works. He is still the seminal voice on the topic with modern works referring to and interacting with his work: Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 57-65; Idem., *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 63-75; Idem., *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1971); Idem., *Rediscovering the Parables* (New York: Scribner, 1966); Idem., *The Lord's Prayer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Idem., *The Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963).

<sup>407</sup> Perhaps the most famous adherent of this view and one who interacted directly with Jeremias' claims is James Barr. Barr's most well-known and influential challenge to Jeremias' claims is the following: “‘Abbā Isn't ‘Daddy.’” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (1988): 28-47. An additional proponent of this view and another scholar who interacted directly with Jeremias' views and sought to provide a challenge and critique is Willem A. VanGemeren: Willem A. VanGemeren, “‘Abbā’ in the Old Testament.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 4 (December 1988): 385-98.

<sup>408</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>409</sup> Jeremias explores and defends this view at length in *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57-65.

<sup>410</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “‘Αββά,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Abridged Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 1.

<sup>411</sup> Due to their later date, the Talmud/Targums are not addressed in this study. However, this does not mean that they are unimportant in understanding the language and culture of first-century Palestine and Palestinian Judaism. As demonstrated here, these reflect current usage with Jesus' life and ministry and the development of the theology, culture, and linguistics of the Jews in the subsequent years. For this reason, they were not considered in the survey of Second Temple Jewish literature. For two helpful introductions to the Talmud/Targums, see: Paul V. M. Flesher and Bruce D. Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011);



experiences the taste of wheat (i.e. when it is weaned), it learns to say 'abba and 'immā' (i.e. these are the first sounds which it makes)."<sup>412</sup> That abba was a term employed by little children for their fathers is further affirmed by the Targum's rendering of Isaiah 8:4, which reads that "Before the child learns to call *abba* and *imma*," with the emphasis on the child's youth and the intimate address of a child to their father utilizing abba.<sup>413</sup> This historical background to the term is also confirmed by the church fathers John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrrihus who all attest that in ancient Palestine, little children used to call their fathers "Abba."<sup>414</sup>

Another relevant example of this comes from the Jewish Talmud. As was defended in the previous two sections, there is no instance where Yahweh is directly referenced or referred to with the Aramaic Abba. There is only one possible reference in late Jewish literature where Abba is used in a potential yet indirect and vague reference to God. What is significant about it is that it affirms that Abba during the period was the standard term used by young children for their fathers. In Tannith 23b, the following text demonstrates that Abba was used by children as a childlike address to their fathers:

When the world was in need of rain, our teachers used to send the schoolchildren to him, who grasped the hem of his coat and implored him: 'Daddy, Daddy, give us rain' ('*Abba*', *abba*, *hab lan mitra*'). He said to Him (God): 'Master of the world, grant it (the rain) for the sake of these who are not yet able to distinguish between an 'abba' who has the power to give rain, and an 'abba' who has not (b. Ta'an. 23b).

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David James Shepherd, Jan Joosten, and Michaël van der Meer, *Septuagint, Targum and Beyond: Comparing Aramaic and Greek Versions from Jewish Antiquity* (Boston: BRILL, 2019). For a work that addresses the specific Targum referenced here, see: Bruce D. Chilton, *The Glory of Israel: The Theology and Provenience of the Isaiah Targum* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1983).

<sup>412</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 59; Idem., *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 69.

<sup>413</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 59.

<sup>414</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 70.

This text does not resemble Christ's direct address of Yahweh as Abba for two primary reasons.<sup>415</sup> The first is that Yahweh is not addressed as Abba but as "Master of the world," a much more traditional title for Yahweh by Jews during the period. Second, the potential reference to Yahweh as Abba is Hanin ha-Nehba's mere repetition of the children's vernacular in "almost a joking manner."<sup>416</sup> Thus, while this story does not represent Abba language used about Yahweh, it does affirm the position that Abba was the intimate, familial term employed by children for their fathers within ancient Palestinian Aramaic.<sup>417</sup> While more evidence and scholarly attestation to this cultural, historical, and linguistic background for Abba could be provided, three final sources will be briefly cited.

Gerhard Kittel supports the view that Abba comes from the speech of children and connotes an intimacy and filiality that would have been offensive to the Jews of the period when applied to Yahweh.<sup>418</sup> Concerning Jesus' use of Abba, he writes that it is a "Term which must have sounded familiar and disrespectful to His contemporaries because used in the everyday life

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<sup>415</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge, Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, affirm the position that will be presented based upon Jeremias' argumentation that Abba was never employed as a title, addresses, or in reference to Yahweh: Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "Αββά," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Abridged Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 1; Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 1.

<sup>416</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 69.

<sup>417</sup> While outside the scope of this chapter, Jeremias' treatment of this issue demonstrates convincingly the preceding point that this text does not represent Abba being employed as a title or address for Yahweh: Jeremias writes, "At first sight it would seem as if here we have one instance in which God is called 'Abba. But two things must be observed. First, the word 'abba' is applied to God in almost a joking manner. Hanin appeals to God's mercy by adopting the cry "Daddy, Daddy, give us rain," which the children repeat after him in a chorus, calling God an "'Abba' who has the power to give rain," as children would in their own language. The second point is still more important. Hanin by no means addresses God as 'Abba'. On the contrary, his address "Master of the world." No doubt the story is something like a prelude to s assertion that the heavenly Father knows what his children need (Matt (par.), that he sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matt 5:45), and that he gives good things to his children who ask him (Matt 7:11 / Luke 11:13). But it does not give us the looked-for attestation of 'abba' as an address to God." Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 69.

<sup>418</sup> Another scholar who affirms this view and directly references Kittel and agrees with him is Joseph Grassi: Joseph A. Grassi, "'Abba', Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 3 (1982): 449–58.

of the family. In other words, He uses the simple ‘speech of the child to its father.’”<sup>419</sup> Brannan also confirms this by defining Abba as, “An informal term that a child would be privileged to use with his own father.”<sup>420</sup> Finally, M’Clintock and Strong write concerning the usage of Abba during the New Testament in the Palestinian dialect of Aramaic that it was commonly employed “from infancy in addressing the male parent, like the modern papa; hence its occurrence in the New Testament only as a vocative.”<sup>421</sup>

A second significant historical, cultural, and linguistic expansion of this term was its development from the simple usage of children to that of a term employed by adult children to their fathers.<sup>422</sup> Jeremias addresses the development of the usage of Abba in Palestine thoroughly and a summation of his treatment of this development is included here:

Already in pre-Christian times this word, which surely originated from the idiom of the small child, had vastly extended its range of meaning in Palestinian Aramaic. ‘Abba’ supplanted the older form *‘abi* as an address to the father that was used in Palestinian Aramaic at least until the second century BCE, as we have learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Abba furthermore took over the connotations of ‘my father’ and of ‘the father’; it even occasionally replaced ‘his father’ and ‘our father.’ In this way, the word no longer remained restricted to the idiom of little children. Grown sons and daughters called their

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<sup>419</sup> Gerhard Kittel. “ἄββᾶ,” In Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), TDNT 1:6.

<sup>420</sup> Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), ἄββᾶ.

<sup>421</sup> John M’Clintock and James Strong, “Ab’ba,” *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1880), 5.

<sup>422</sup> Jeremias, the most influential scholar in addressing Christ’s usage of Abba language for God and its significance to the theology of His life and ministry and the New Testament as a whole has been criticized for not addressing this development of the term. As has been referenced in this study, the most famous critique of Jeremias’ views is the by James Barr, entitled, “‘Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy.’” James Barr, “‘Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy.’” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (1988): 28-47. Barr’s criticisms and critiques will be addressed later on, however, Jeremias *did* directly address this development of the term Abba and added significance depth and nuance to his assertions Abba in the Gospels in a manner that James Barr does not account for. Jeremias admits that this nuance of interpretation developed over time, “When I started this study, which occupied me for quite a few years, I thought that it was just this babbling sound that Jesus adopted. But soon I noticed that this conclusion was too rash...” Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 70. However, even his seminal work, *The Prayers of Jesus*, includes a lengthy exploration and discussion of the development of this term. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57-65. Thus, Barr’s criticism’s ignore Jeremias’ discussion of the development of this term and its implications upon his subsequent research.

fathers 'abba as well (see Luke 15:21) and only on formal occasions resorted to "Sir" (Greek *Kyrie*; see Matt 21:29). But in spite of this development, the origin of the word in the language of infants never falls into oblivion.<sup>423</sup>

Two elements of this development of usage are essential to be grasped if Christ's use of this term concerning Yahweh are to be understood. First, it is significant that the semantic range of Abba in Palestine expanded to the point where it was appropriate to express intimacy and honor between an adult child and their father.<sup>424</sup> For, "At the time of Jesus to address one's father as abba was no longer a practice limited to small children."<sup>425</sup> Rather, "even in the pre-Christian period, abba is attested as a respectful address to old men."<sup>426</sup> Thus, as Barr, VanGemeren, and others have noted, Abba was not the unintelligible babble of a child. Rather, it was often used as the respectful address of an adult child to their father.<sup>427</sup> This certainly must be incorporated into the subsequent exegesis of the Gospels and the survey of Jesus' unprecedented use of Abba as an address to Yahweh. However, the fact that Abba was employed as a respectful address of sons to fathers during the period does not mean that it lost the intimacy or close filial connotations of a young child addressing their father. This is significant for, as was already referenced above, "Despite the degree of the extension, it was never forgotten that abba derived from the language of small children."<sup>428</sup> Thus, though this term was employed by adult children as a respectful address to their fathers, it never lost its original background of being an intimate familial term

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<sup>423</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 70.

<sup>424</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), ἄββᾶ.

<sup>425</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 60.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>427</sup> James Barr, "'Abbā Isn't 'Daddy.'" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (1988): 28-47; Willem A. VanGemeren, "'Abbā' in the Old Testament." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 4 (December 1988): 385-98.

<sup>428</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 59.

characteristic of Jewish children and their fathers.<sup>429</sup> Verbrugge affirms this dual nuance to the term Abba during the New Testament period, writing,

'Abbā' as a form of address to one's father was no longer restricted to children but was also used by adult sons and daughters. The childish character of the word ('daddy') thus receded, and 'abbā' acquired the warm, familiar ring that we may feel in such an expression as 'dear father.'<sup>430</sup>

These two elements concerning the connotation of the Aramaic term abba in first-century Palestine are enlightening and foundational for approaching Christ's employment of Abba in relation to Yahweh. The historic understanding of Abba as an intimate and familial term is affirmed by all of the relevant cultural, historical, and literary material. There is nothing that challenges or calls into question the classic understanding of Abba as the intimate language of a child and their father and "a mark of the everyday language of the family."<sup>431</sup> At the same time, the development of this term also sheds light on Christ's usage in the Gospels. The fact that this term developed to the point that it carried a connotation of honor and respect and was used by adult children does not discredit the classic position but only further enriches, enhances, and develops it. As will be seen in the subsequent exegesis of the Gospels, Jesus' use of Abba to address the covenant God of the Old Testament carried both the intimate familial tone of a child with their father and the respectful undertones of an obedient son with the utmost respect for His father. It is the convergence of these two themes that make Christ's use so appropriate based

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<sup>429</sup> Jeremias continues his treatment of the development of abba in first-century Palestine, noting that, "The extension of the significance of abba which we have just outlined meant that grown up children, too, no longer addressed their father in everyday conversation as *abhi*, but used abba instead. Only when being particularly obsequious did they address their father as 'my lord',\* like the son who was later dis-obedient, in the parable of the two sons (Matt. 21.29: *Ἐγὼ κύριε*). The story of the spoilt son who is thrown out by his father because he greets a charlatan with, 'Hail, my lord, my master, my father' is about respectful behaviour, and not about everyday language.<sup>46</sup> The old-fashioned *abhi* further serves to underline the obsequiousness. So we can see that to address a father as abba is a mark of the everyday language of the family." Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 60.

<sup>430</sup> Verbrugge, "Ἀββᾶ," 1.

<sup>431</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 60.

upon the cultural, historical, and linguistic milieu of the period and at the same time, what made His approach so novel, unprecedented, and controversial. The full implications of this topic will be explored further in this section. For now, it is sufficient to conclude that Abba in the first century in Palestine was an intimate and familial term employed by small children in loving affection for their fathers as well as by adult children expressing honor and respect for their Abba.

*Study of Jesus' Use of Abba as an Address for God in His Life and Ministry*

The historical and cultural background of abba during the New Testament period in Palestine has been explored and this forms the necessary and significant context for Jesus' use of this term in the Gospels. The second important issue that must be addressed is whether Abba was only used by Christ in Mark 14:36, or whether it stands behind Jesus' other uses of Father language for Yahweh in the Gospels. The thesis on which this study is predicated is that behind each instance of πατήρ as a direct address of God in the written text of the Gospels in Greek, was the original Aramaic word Abba employed orally by Jesus. Once again, Jeremias is the seminal scholar on the issue promoting the probability that, "Every time when Jesus addressed God as his Father in prayer he used the Aramaic word 'abba.'"<sup>432</sup>

The fact that Jesus used the Aramaic Abba as a direct address to Yahweh in prayer is attested explicitly in Christ's prayer in Gethsemane by Mark's Gospel, which most scholars agree was the earliest Gospel to be written, "And he said, 'Abba, Father (Αββα ὁ πατήρ), all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will'" (Mark 14:36).<sup>433</sup> While there are other significant factors that favor the view that Abba was

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<sup>432</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 69.

<sup>433</sup> και ἔλεγεν, Αββα ὁ πατήρ, πάντα δυνατά σοι· παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ· ἀλλ' οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σὺ.

employed by Christ outside of this text and was His frequent title for God, the most decisive is the grammar behind the Greek text that favors an Aramaic original. This is not a minority view but one that is attested by a variety of scholars. For example, Kittel affirms this position by writing,

As concerns the usage of Jesus, the probability is that He employed the word אָבָא not merely where it is expressly attested (Mk. 14:36) but in all cases, and particularly in address to God, where the Evangelists record Him as saying ὁ πατήρ, πάτερ, ὁ πατήρ μου, πάτερ μου, and even perhaps πάτερ ἡμῶν.<sup>434</sup>

If this can be proven, this will become one of the most significant and exegetically conclusive discoveries for the subsequent exegetical survey of Christ's usage of Father language in relation to Yahweh. Verbrugge also affirms the probability of this view, concluding that,

The invocation 'abbā' is expressly attested in the Markan text of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). But in the other prayers of Jesus recorded by the Evangelists (πατήρ), there is good reason to argue that the Aramaic 'abbā' underlies, either directly or indirectly, the various Greek versions of his invocation of the Father.<sup>435</sup>

Jeremias presents a detailed exploration investigation of this issue in defense of the fact that Abba was the common term used by Jesus to address Yahweh directly outside of Mark 14:36. A brief summary of his major points of argumentation goes as follows. Specifically, in the prayers of Jesus, the address "Father" takes different forms in Greek that are best explained by an original Abba. As Kittel also argued, in addition to πάτερ, ὁ πατήρ μου, πάτερ μου, and πάτερ ἡμῶν, ὁ πατήρ is "used as a vocative that is not correct Greek usage."<sup>436</sup> Jeremias concludes concerning this that,

This oscillation between vocative and nominative that occurs even in one and the same logion (Matt 11:25, 26/Luke 10:21) cannot be explained without taking into account that

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<sup>434</sup> Gerhard Kittel, "Αββᾶ," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–), 6.

<sup>435</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "Αββᾶ," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Abridged Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1.

<sup>436</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 68.

the word 'abba...' was current in first-century Palestinian Aramaic not only as an address, but also for 'the father' (the emphatic state; status emphaticus).<sup>437</sup>

Concerning the use of Abba in Mark as well as in Romans and Galatians, Fitzmyer affirms Jeremias' linguistic analysis of the term and its employment by the biblical authors.<sup>438</sup> Joseph Grassi also affirms this usage and the view that this not only represents the "*ipsissima vox*" of Jesus of Nazareth, as Jeremias claims but that Abba was the term regularly employed by Jesus to address Yahweh.<sup>439</sup> Based upon the linguistic evidence, it cannot be proven definitively that Abba stands behind the New Testament's rendering of Jesus' teaching using the Greek πατήρ or at the very minimum His prayers. However, as the preceding survey has shown, it is both possible and highly probable based upon the linguistic evidence that in every prayer where Jesus directly addresses Yahweh as Father, He employs the Aramaic Abba. Beyond this, as Kittel, Verbrugge, Jeremias, and other affirm, it is linguistically possible and probable that Abba is used by Jesus "in all cases, and particularly in address to God, where the Evangelists record Him as saying ὁ πατήρ, πάτερ, ὁ πατήρ μου, πάτερ μου, and even perhaps πάτερ ἡμῶν."<sup>440</sup> It is significant that even Barr, Jeremias' most fervent theological counterpart, admitted that this is a possibility and cannot be

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<sup>437</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*; 68.

<sup>438</sup> The Aramaic loan-word ܐܒܘܐ (*Abba*; 'father') occurs three times in the New Testament—Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15; Mk 14:36—each time transliterated in Greek characters as ἀββα and each time accompanied by the Greek translation ὁ πατήρ ('father'). *Abba* should be understood as an Aramaic emphatic use (there is no vocative), translated by a Greek nominative (usually understood as 'nominative in lieu of vocative'). Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Abba and Jesus' Relation to God," in *A cause de l'Évangile: Etudes sur les Synoptiques et les Actes offertes au P. Jacques Dupont*, ed. R. Gantoy, LD 123 (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 18.

<sup>439</sup> "It has been widely accepted that Abba in the mouth of Jesus is a relic, an *ipsissima vox* relayed by tradition (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). As such, it would sum up Jesus' unique relationship to the Father because he employed an intimate family expression, Abba, used in Aramaic almost exclusively in these contexts and rarely if ever in regard to God." Joseph A. Grassi, "'Abba', Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 3 (1982): 449.

<sup>440</sup> Kittel, *Abba*, 6.



disproven.<sup>441</sup> Thus, there is sufficient linguistic background to substantiate the position presented here that Abba was employed by Jesus as an address for Yahweh especially in prayer not only in the Markan example but in the majority of Father texts where ὁ πατήρ, πάτερ, ὁ πατήρ μου, πάτερ μου, and even perhaps πάτερ ἡμῶν are used by the biblical authors.<sup>442</sup>

While the linguistic argument alone is sufficient to affirm a widespread usage of Abba by Jesus, there are at least two other significant and convincing points of evidence that strengthen and substantiate this view. The first is that the historical witness is clear that Jesus of Nazareth “the Son of Mary and Joseph was a Galilean and spoke Aramaic.”<sup>443</sup> Based on the culture and historical context of first-century Israel and the clear witness of the Gospels, (Mark 5:41; 7:34; Matt 5:22; 6:24; 27:6), Jesus of Nazareth was an Aramaic-speaking Jew from the region of the Galilee.<sup>444</sup> Outside of Abba, there are numerous Aramaic words employed by Jesus and retained in the Greek as “Another way the Greek text depicts an Aramaic-speaking environment and

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<sup>441</sup> “While it is possible that all cases in which Jesus addresses God as ‘father’ derive from an original *’abba*, it is impossible to *prove* that this is so, for there are alternative hypotheses which seem to fit the evidence equally well.” Barr, *Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy*, 46-47.

<sup>442</sup> A detailed treatment of Aramaic grammar is outside the scope of this study. The goal has been to provide sufficient evidence in favor of Jesus’ use of the Aramaic Abba throughout the Gospels. However, much of the argumentation as presented by Jeremias, Fitzmyer, Kittel, Verbrugge, and others in favor of an original Aramaic Abba (אבא) behind the Greek Father (πατήρ) depends on a deeper understanding of the relationship between Hebrew and Aramaic, the development of these languages in the Second Temple period, and the likelihood that the emphatic use of Abba is the original behind the Greek nominative. For resources that provide an extensive treatment of Aramaic and address these issues at a linguistic level, see the following works: Takamitsu *Muraoka, A Biblical Aramaic Reader: With an Outline Grammar* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers & Booksellers, 2020); Holger Gzella, *Aramaic: A History of the First World Language* (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 127-135; Edward M. Cook, *Dictionary of Qumran Aramaic* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015); Stefan Weninger, ed., *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2011); David Shepherd, Jan Joosten, and Michaël N. van der Meer, eds., *Septuagint, Targum and Beyond: Comparing Aramaic and Greek Versions from Jewish Antiquity* (Leiden Boston: BRILL, 2020); Holger Gzella, *A Cultural History of Aramaic: From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2015) Idem., *Languages from the World of the Bible* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012).

<sup>443</sup> Szymik, *Jesus’ Intitulation of God As Abba*, 499.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

creates an authentic atmosphere.”<sup>445</sup> The various Aramaic names and nicknames for people, locations, phrases, and instructions in the New Testament confirm this point that Aramaic was the common language in which Jesus lived and ministered. Mark, for example, “Retains and then translates a number of Aramaic terms, primarily in the words of Jesus (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36; 15:34; the two exceptions are 10:46 and 15:22).”<sup>446</sup> Thus, Abba does not represent a rare or uncommon instance of Aramaic in the Gospels but is rather one of the glimpses the reader is given into the actual words employed by Jesus in His native tongue. The plethora of Aramaic words retained in the Greek is striking, as Meier notes for the “Clear presence of an Aramaic substratum in many of Jesus' sayings stands in stark contrast to the relative absence of Hebrew words and constructions.”<sup>447</sup> The examples could be multiplied, but the scholarly literature is quite clear in its support for Jesus' original teaching originating in Aramaic as these various Aramaic examples demonstrate within the Greek text.

Finally, perhaps the most convincing argument in favor of frequent usage of Abba as a direct address to Yahweh by Jesus is the fact that even among the Greek-speaking Gentile

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<sup>445</sup> Gzella’s work on Aramaic contains an insightful discussion on this issue. He writes, “For similar reasons, titles and nicknames are sometimes also given in their Aramaic forms, such as Abba ‘Father’ as a term of address for God in prayer (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6); *Kephas* ‘(firm) rock’ as a clarifying nickname for Peter (John 1:42; unlike Greek Petros, this Aramaic word is not used for individual stones); and *Rabbouni* ‘my master’ for Jesus (Mark 10:51; John 20:16). This is another way the Greek text depicts an Aramaic-speaking environment and creates an authentic atmosphere, just like fiction authors can easily characterize French-speaking characters by occasionally using French expressions. The frequent terms ‘Pharisees’ (literally ‘set apart’) and ‘Messiah’ (‘anointed’) must also be Aramaic, as they are passive participles, a grammatical form where Aramaic has an *-i-* in the second syllable instead of the *-u-* found in Hebrew. But these are preexisting loanwords, the second of which was only later literally calqued into Greek as *christos* ‘Christ.’” Holger Gzella, *Aramaic: A History of the First World Language* (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 128.

<sup>446</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament*, 68.

<sup>447</sup> Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 266.

Christian communities, the Aramaic Abba was retained as an address for God in prayer.<sup>448</sup> Once again, Meier captures the substantial weight of this point by writing,

If Jesus regularly spoke in Greek, one is hard pressed to explain the tenacious survival of the Aramaic address to God, *abba*, even among Paul's Greek speaking Gentile converts in Asia Minor (Gal. 4:6)—to say nothing of Gentile Christians in Rome who had never met Paul (Rom. 8:15). The most reasonable explanation is that *abba* represents a striking usage of the Aramaic speaking Jesus, a usage that so impressed itself on and embedded itself in the minds of his first disciples that it was handed on as a fixed prayer formula even to the first Gentile believers.<sup>449</sup>

The theological significance and implications of the continuation of Abba as an address to God by non-Hebrew or Aramaic-speaking communities will be explored in a later section. However, the Pauline usages of Abba in the context of prayer provide an insightful window into the religious world of Greek-speaking Christians as they adopted the foreign Aramaic word into their spiritual lives. Even before the written witness of the Gospels, it is significant that “These letters actually provide our earliest attestations of the Aramaic term *abba* in the vocative case, whether for God or a human father.”<sup>450</sup> Why would Greek-speaking Gentiles adopt this Aramaic term as an intimate form of address to God in their prayers? There is no reasonable explanation that sufficiently accounts for all of the relevant evidence other than the reality that they are appealing to the very words of Jesus and applying this foreign word to their prayer life in emulation of the Lord Jesus and following His pattern in prayer.

For, as Jeremias has argued, there is nothing like this approach to Yahweh in the entirety of the Old Testament and all of the Jewish literature. The manner in which Jesus of Nazareth approached Yahweh, the covenant God of the Old Testament, was unprecedented and entirely

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<sup>448</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*, 68.

<sup>449</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus vol. 1: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1:266.

<sup>450</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 68; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “*Abba* and Jesus' Relation to God,” in *À Cause de L'Évangile* (Études sur les Synoptiques et les Actes: Paris: Cerf, 1985), 28–30.

unique as expressed most certainly through His employment of Abba as a direct address for God. For, “This is without analogy in Jewish prayers of the first millennium C.E. Nowhere in the literature of the prayers of ancient Judaism—an immense treasure all too little explored—is this invocation of God as 'Abba' to be found, either in the liturgical or in informal prayers.”<sup>451</sup> Thus, for the Greek-speaking communities to develop this usage on their own is unfathomable. Why would this term be employed by the Apostle Paul to a people in a foreign tongue unless there was the prevalent shared understanding that to cry, Αββα ὁ πατήρ, was to join the Lord Jesus in His very words and to experience a relationship with Αββα ὁ πατήρ just as He did? The most reasonable and likely answer to this intriguing usage not only in the Gospels where it might be expected but in the Pauline letters to Gentile Greek-speaking Christians is that the early church adopted the very words of Jesus in His own tongue due to their importance and influence through His life, example in prayer, ministry, and teaching.

Once again, this is a significant topic with extremely relevant and important exegetical implications for this study and the life, ministry, and witness of the church. This will be treated in depth in subsequent chapters in this study. The aim of this section is only to demonstrate that it is not only possible but also extremely probable based on the evidence that Abba was the common and frequent term employed by Jesus as an address to Yahweh. For the Greek-speaking Gentile communities to adopt this term and for it to be employed by the Apostle Paul who was not one of Jesus’ original disciples attests to its widespread usage by the early church and its impact upon their theology and approach to God through prayer. Therefore, as Jeremias so aptly

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<sup>451</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*, 68.

concluded, “There can be no doubt at all that this early Christian cry is an echo of Jesus' own praying.”<sup>452</sup>

*Summary of Abba Father in the First Century and Jesus' Use of Abba*

In conclusion, the two primary observations of this section can be summarized as follows. First, Abba in the first century in Palestine was an intimate and familial term employed by small children in loving affection for their fathers as well as by adult children expressing honor and respect for their abba. Jesus' usage of the term as a direct address to Yahweh picked up on both of these relevant connotations of the term and represented an unprecedented and theologically rich approach to Yahweh that is represented nowhere in the Old Testament. Second, it is not only possible but also extremely probable based on the evidence that Abba was the common and frequent term employed by Jesus as an address to Yahweh outside of the one instance where the original Aramaic Abba is utilized in Mark's Gospel. As Szymik concludes in a thorough and detailed exegetical analysis examination of this issue, “Conclusively, it should be stated that Jeremias's study remains valid in its basic theses. ‘Abba, Father,’ the cry of the historical Jesus, was a brief and, at the same time, fullest expression of his filial relationship with the Father.”<sup>453</sup>

This position is supported by the linguistic evidence concerning the normal usage of *πάτερ* in contrast with the way *πάτερ* is utilized by the biblical authors in a manner that is better understood if the original term employed by Jesus was Abba. This position is also confirmed by

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<sup>452</sup> “In his own words, Jeremias concludes: “Finally, besides Mark 14:36 and the variation of the address ‘father’ in Greek, we have a third piece of evidence to prove that Jesus said ‘abba’ when he prayed. It consists of two passages in Paul: Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. They inform us that the Christian communities used the cry *Ἀββὰ ὁ πατήρ* (‘Abba, Father’) and considered this an utterance brought forth by the Holy Spirit. This applies to the Pauline (Galatians) as well as the non-Pauline (Romans) communities, and there can be no doubt at all that this early Christian cry is an echo of Jesus' own praying.” Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*, 68.

<sup>453</sup> Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba*, 498-499.

the Aramaic environment surrounding Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated by His own speech and Aramaic names, places, terms, nicknames, and phrases that appear within the Gospel. Finally, the surprising employment of Αββα ὁ πατήρ by the Apostle Paul to Greek-speaking Christian communities is only conceivable if this was an appeal to the “*ipsissima vox*” of Jesus.<sup>454</sup>

### **The Novelty and Unprecedented Nature of Jesus’ Approach to God as Abba**

If Abba was an intimate and familial term employed by small children in loving affection for their fathers as well as by adult children expressing honor and respect and was the common and frequent term employed by Jesus, this begs the important question, was Jesus’ use of Father (πατήρ, אב) distinct or unique for His time and among His contemporaries? As has already been demonstrated, the answer is a resounding yes, which drives the reader to consider the significance of Jesus’ revelation of and teaching concerning God as Father. Before surveying the Gospels and analyzing Christ’s use of Abba Father, a brief introduction to the novelty and unprecedented nature of Jesus’ approach to God as Abba will be given here. This topic will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter. However, to establish a proper theological framework for analyzing the Gospels, a few comments and insights will be offered here.

As has already been referenced, Joachim Jeremias addresses this issue at length demonstrating the distinctive nature of Jesus’ theology of God as Father and its significance for New Testament theology. As was done in this study, Jeremias surveyed the entirety of the Old Testament and the most significant literature of early Palestinian Judaism. Upon surveying the Scriptures and the most prominent Jewish prayers and materials from the period, Jeremias concludes convincingly that “There is no evidence of ‘my Father’ being used as a personal

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<sup>454</sup> Grassi, ‘*Abba*, 449; Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57. This point is elaborated further in chapter seven of this dissertation.

address to God. For Jesus to address God as ‘my Father’ is therefore something new.”<sup>455</sup> This is not only true for “fixed liturgical prayer” but also when surveying “free prayer” among historic Judaism in Talmudic literature.<sup>456</sup> While this is accurate when considering the word Father concerning a Jewish theology of God, “We can say quite definitely that there is *no analogy at all* in the whole literature of Jewish prayer for God being addressed as Abba.”<sup>457</sup> The significance of these findings is critical for developing a proper theology of Jesus’ relationship to God and His revelation to His disciples that God is not only Father but also Abba. Jeremias writes,<sup>458</sup>

We are thus confronted with a fact of the utmost significance. Whereas there is not a single instance of God being addressed as Abba in the literature of Jewish prayer, Jesus always addressed him in this way (with the exception of the cry from the cross, Mark 15.34). So we have here a quite unmistakable characteristic of the *ipsissima vox Jesu*.<sup>459</sup>

This approach to God was revolutionary among all ANE religions but especially to the Judaism in which Jesus was raised and to the Jews whom he addressed.<sup>460</sup> There was absolutely no parallel in Judaism nor the Old Testament to approach Yahweh as Father the way Jesus did and instructed His followers to do.<sup>461</sup> Carson writes concerning this,

The tendency in Jewish circles was to multiply titles ascribing sovereignty, lordship, glory, grace, and the like to God. Against such a background, Jesus’ habit of addressing

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<sup>455</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> For more discussion from Jeremias on this issue, see: Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 61-68.

<sup>459</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57.

<sup>460</sup> For a detailed discussion concerning this topic, see: D. A Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Some Aspects of Johannine Theology Against a Jewish Background* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 45ff.

<sup>461</sup> For an insightful study of these claims and a defense of Jeremias’ position, see: Stefan Szymik, “Jesus’ Intitulation of God as Abba: Its Sources and Impact on the Idea of the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament.” *Verbum Vitae* 38, no. 2 (2020): 485–502.

God as his own Father (Mk 14:36) and teaching his disciples to do the same could appear only familiar and presumptuous to opponents, personal and gracious to followers.<sup>462</sup>

Thus, when Jesus of Nazareth introduced His disciples and subsequently the world to the reality that the covenant God of Israel can be called and related to as Abba, this was a paradigm-altering reality for Jews and Gentiles. Addressing God directly, intimately, and personally as Father itself would have been a seismic shift in the Jewish understanding of God, but Jesus' use of the more intimate, familiar, childlike address of Abba in Aramaic pushed the boundaries even further.

Jeremias addresses this very idea, writing,

We can see from all this why God is not addressed as Abba in Jewish prayers: to the Jewish mind it would have been disrespectful and therefore inconceivable to address God with this familiar word. For Jesus to venture to take this step was something new and unheard of. He spoke to God like a child to its father, simply, inwardly, confidently, Jesus' use of abba in addressing God reveals the heart of his relationship with God.<sup>463</sup>

Thus, much of Jesus' theology of God not only hangs on His revelation of Him as Father but on His unique use of Abba which would transcend His life and ministry and would be adopted by the early church and New Testament authors outside of His original twelve disciples (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).<sup>464</sup> Keener notes that there is a foundation laid in the Old Testament for viewing God as Father. However, through the use of abba, the revelation of God as Father, and the invitation for His disciples to approach Him as sons and daughters just as He approached Him as a son, "Jesus summons his disciples to appropriate this intimacy still more deeply (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6)."<sup>465</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to overemphasize the significance and importance of Jesus use

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<sup>462</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 243.

<sup>463</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 62.

<sup>464</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 267-270.

<sup>465</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, Mt 6:9-13.



of Abba. As Diétrich said so eloquently, “The whole miracle of divine grace is contained in this single word.”<sup>466</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As the New Testament text is approached and especially Christ’s ample use of Father as a direct address for Yahweh, three major points from this section will be incorporated into the subsequent exegesis. First, as explored above, the historical, cultural, and linguistic background info demonstrates that Abba in the first century in Palestine was an intimate and familial term employed by small children in loving affection for their fathers as well as by adult children expressing honor and respect for their abba. Second, and extremely insightful and significant for this survey, it is not only possible but also extremely probable based upon the evidence that Abba was the common and frequent term employed by Jesus as an address to Yahweh throughout the Gospels. Thus, Jesus’ use of Abba goes beyond Mark's Gospel and permeates all of His teaching and addresses for God, especially in prayer. Finally, Jesus’ use of Abba as a direct address for Yahweh represents an unprecedented and theologically revolutionary development of the Jewish conception of Yahweh when compared with the relevant Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish literature. The intimacy and access that Jesus demonstrated in addressing God as Abba and the scandalous invitation for His disciples to do the same are truly groundbreaking and merit further attention to fully explore their theological implications. The heart of the New Testament Gospel and that which distinguishes it from the

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<sup>466</sup> Suzanne de Diétrich, *Saint Matthew* (John Knox Press, London, 1962).

Old as categorically new can be summarized in Jesus' use of Abba for God and His invitation for disciples to experience unimaginable intimacy and access with Him by doing the same.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> Among many others, this concept was inspired and affirmed by: J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 182–83; John W. Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 105.

## Chapter 6: New Testament Theology of God as Father (*Abba*)

### Introduction: New Testament Theology of God as Father (*Abba*) in the Gospels

There are 413 instances of the term father used in the New Testament. Of these, “As many as 255 convey the meaning: ὁ πατήρ. God the Father.”<sup>468</sup> This is extraordinary when considering that there were only fifteen texts in the Old Testament that referred to Yahweh in this manner.<sup>469</sup> What can account for this proliferation of Father language in the New Testament for God? How did a minor note in the Old Testament become the overwhelming voice in the new covenant? While a significant portion of these usages appear within the Gospels themselves on the lips of Jesus, this is not the only place where Father becomes a prominent title for Yahweh in the New Testament. Rather, all of the New Testament authors join Jesus in their unified witness that the covenant God of the Old Testament is known as *Abba* Father, and believers are invited to experience the same intimacy and access with and to Him as Jesus did as His sons and daughters through the New Covenant. Even more extraordinary, Christians do not merely come to God as their Father generally, but they address Him as *Abba* Father as His sons and daughters with an intimacy and access that was unprecedented in the Old Covenant. All of this is due to Jesus of Nazareth’s relationship with and revelation of Yahweh as Father as revealed in the Gospels.

It was not merely Jesus’ use of Father that was extraordinary, but specifically, this relationship as expressed through prayer. No one in the history of Israel or Second Temple Judaism approached Yahweh with such confidence, intimacy, and such a filial closeness of relationship. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, understood Himself as the very Son of Yahweh, and

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<sup>468</sup> Stefan Szymik, “Jesus’ Intitulation Of God As *Abba*: Its Sources And Impact On The Idea Of The Fatherhood Of God In The New Testament,” *Verbum Vitae* 38/2 (2020) 498.

<sup>469</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 39.

His role as Messiah and His divinity were inextricably tied to His role as Son. While these alone are radical and noteworthy claims, this is not where He stopped. As the Gospels testify and as is examined in this chapter, Jesus taught His disciples that they too were children of Yahweh and they could share in the infinite and intimate love of the Trinity as sons and daughters of God their Father.

These truths are what make the New Covenant distinctively and definitively new. As Packer so eloquently stated, “Everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. ‘Father’ is the Christian name of God.”<sup>470</sup> This statement sums up the heart of this dissertation. The necessary historical, cultural, linguistic, and theological foundations have been laid and now the thesis of this study is ready to be tested. As will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapters, it is not an overstatement to affirm that the hermeneutical key to understanding the unprecedented and novel nature of Christ’s teaching concerning prayer and the radical intimacy and access that his disciples enjoy with God is His relationship with and revelation of Yahweh as Abba Father,

The preceding chapter defined Abba, argued that this was Jesus’ common approach to Yahweh especially in prayer, and began to explore the theological implications of this development. Here, this theme will be traced in a biblical theological manner through the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels. As was done in the Old Testament, the same methodological approach will be employed here in the Gospels. While other pertinent texts outside the Gospels will be considered, the priority of exegetical significance will be given to Christ’s teaching and

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<sup>470</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 182–83. For another scholar who affirms this view concerning the distinctive and definitive nature of Christ’s use of Abba Father language for Yahweh and His instruction for His disciples to do the same, see: John W. Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 105.

instruction and His relationship with God as Father in the Gospels. Thus, a detailed section on each Gospel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John will be provided to understand Christ's usage of Abba in relationship to God as Father as well as any pertinent texts with exegetical significance for better understanding the teaching of Jesus concerning not only God as Father but Yahweh as both Jesus' and His disciples' Abba.

In addition, a brief survey of God as Father in the remainder of the New Testament with an emphasis on the explosion of Father language in the New Testament and the supremacy of God as Abba in the New Covenant will also be provided. While this does not fall within the primary scope of this dissertation, both of the above points must be taken into consideration as the exegetical implications are fleshed out from the transformative teaching of Jesus. As will be demonstrated, the New Testament is categorically distinct from the Old in both the frequency with which God is addressed as Father as well as the profound transformation of this concept in the lives of believers. This palpable shift in both intimacy with and access to God as Abba Father in the New Testament can be attributed directly to one man; Jesus of Nazareth. His unprecedented employment of Abba Father as a direct address to Yahweh the covenant God of the Old Testament and His instruction to His disciples to do the same is an immeasurable development and transformation of what began in the Old Testament and was fulfilled in the New. The New Testament authors each picked up on Christ's framework of God as Abba Father with both the frequency and familial intimacy, confidence, and courage of the Lord Jesus as the foundation and framework for the New Testament. These ideas and the thesis of this study will now be tested and explored in the Gospels and briefly in the remainder of the New Testament.

## God as Father in the Gospel of Mark

This biblical-theological survey of Jesus' theology of God as Father begins in Mark's Gospel. The focus will be to evaluate Jesus' teaching on prayer and the content of His own prayers where God as Father is the significant theological foundation for the other Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. Mark's Gospel is especially significant for it is widely agreed upon by scholars as being the earliest Gospel written and one of the earliest portions of the New Testament to be penned.<sup>471</sup> Fascinatingly, while not conclusive or the widespread view, there is some evidence to suggest that Mark was the earliest piece of New Testament literature composed and thus provides the earliest witness to the historical Jesus and His life, ministry, and teaching.<sup>472</sup> If Mark's recording of Jesus' prayer to God as Abba Father in Gethsemane predates the other two explicit usages of Abba in reference to God as Father in the Pauline literature, it further affirms the thesis of this study that Abba was the typical address employed by Jesus for Yahweh and stands at the heart of His theology and practice. However, either way, Abba is attested extremely early with most scholars placing Galatians as one of if not the first New Testament letters to be penned.<sup>473</sup> Thus, both Mark's Gospel written first among the Gospels and Paul's earliest letter both affirm the remarkably early attestation of Jesus' use of Abba as an

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<sup>471</sup> Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation Of God As Abba*, 491-492.

<sup>472</sup> For a thorough work arguing for the early dating of the New Testament books and providing evidence that Mark was the first piece of New Testament literature to be written, see: Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022). It must be admitted that not all scholars agree on this dating. Others, for example, see some of Paul's work to be the earliest New Testament writings and especially Galatians. For example, Schelbert dates Mark at a later date, 68–70 AD, and Galatians earlier, 54–55 AD. G. Schelbert, *Abba Vater. Der literarische Befund vom Altaramäischen bis zu den späten Midrasch- und Haggada-Werken in Auseinandersetzung mit den Thesen von Joachim Jeremias*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011), 54. For another example of a scholar defending the earlier date for Galatians and Romans rather than Mark, see: E. A. Obeng, "Abba, Father: The Prayer of the Sons of God," *The Expository Times*, 99(12), 1998, 363–366.

<sup>473</sup> Schelbert, *Abba Vater*, 54.

address for God and its significance for early New Testament theology. For this reason, Mark is the first Gospel addressed in this study.<sup>474</sup>

*Jesus' Abba ὁ πατήρ Prayer In the Garden of Gethsemane In Mark's Gospel*

There are four direct references to God as Father in Mark, each made by Jesus Himself (8:38, 13:32, 11:25, 14:36).<sup>475</sup> Interestingly, while Mark represents the earliest and most foundational reference to God as Abba Father by Jesus and the only explicit use of the Aramaic Abba in the Gospels, Father appears significantly less in Mark than in the other Gospels.<sup>476</sup> Mark's most significant contribution to the New Testament's witness of God as Abba Father as emulated and instructed by Jesus is His extremely early attestation that this represents original usage as early as the late 20s or early 30s.<sup>477</sup> This text as referenced previously in this study is Mark 14:36 where Jesus prays, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you." This is remarkable for as Jeremias defended, Jesus' prayer "Αββα ὁ πατήρ" represents one of the earliest and most authentic sayings of Jesus of Nazareth and as such, contains significant theological and

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<sup>474</sup>For further discussion and exploration of Mark's Gospel, see the following works: Mark L. Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001); Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020); C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2011); William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark the English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); James A. Brooks, *Mark* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991) For specific works that address the social and political context of Mark's use of "Messiah" and "Son of God," see Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda*, WUNT 2:245 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2008); Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology under Caesar: Jesus the Messiah and Roman Imperial Ideology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018); Thomas Scott Caulley, "Balaam's 'Star' Oracle in Jewish and Christian Prophetic Tradition," *ResQ* 56 (2014): 32.

<sup>475</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 89.

<sup>476</sup> For an insightful study that addresses Jesus' usage in Mark's Gospel and the theological and exegetical implications this has for understanding his Christology, see: Thomas Scott Caulley, "The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32, no. 4 (2022): 394–416.

<sup>477</sup> Schelbert writes, "Schliesslich geht die aramäische abba-Anrede – ohne die griechische Übersetzung – auf Jesus selbst, Ende der 20-er, Anfang der 30-er Jahre zurück." Schelbert, *Abba Vater*, 60. In English, "Finally, the Aramaic abba salutation - without the Greek translation - goes back to Jesus himself, at the end of the 20s and beginning of the 30s."

exegetical implications for approaching the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament.<sup>478</sup> The meaning and significance of Αββα in the life and ministry of Jesus was treated at length in the previous section. Here, it is sufficient to note that Mark provides the earliest New Testament reference to God as Father in the Gospels and as will be explored, provides the source material for the development and expansion of this theme in the other Gospel writers, potentially the Pauline literature, and the rest of the New Testament.<sup>479</sup>

A second essential point to note which has major implications for this study is that it is in the context of prayer that Jesus addressed God as Abba Father. While all of Christ's teaching concerning God as Father is significant, as is made clear throughout the subsequent exegesis of the Gospels, it is His relationship with and revelation of Yahweh as His and His disciples' Abba Father through prayer that is most significant and insightful.<sup>480</sup> There is no clearer or more explicit expression of Jesus' intimate and familial relationship with and access to God as Father than His prayer in the garden employing Αββα ὁ πατήρ as a direct address for Yahweh. Once again, this usage was unprecedented as the Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish sources

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<sup>478</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57

<sup>479</sup> For a fascinating and in-depth study from German theologians concerning the nature of early Christianity and the development of the canon, see: Jens Schröter, *From Jesus to the New Testament: Early Christian Theology and the Origin of the New Testament Canon* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013). Another helpful resource on this topic is: Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger, *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2012).

<sup>480</sup> The topic of prayer between the Old and New Testaments and the implications the new covenant has upon the biblical understanding of prayer is an extensive topic that deserves its own full-length treatment. For this dissertation, the focus will be on the transformative effect Christ's address of God as Abba Father and His instruction for His disciples to do the same has upon understanding His teaching concerning prayer. While prayer itself will be addressed in the present and subsequent chapters, it will not be done as thoroughly or exhaustively as this study would like. Therefore, a variety of insightful and detailed treatments of New and Old Testament prayer are provided here for further study: Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016); Richard N. Longenecker, *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co, 2001); David Crump, *Knocking on Heavens' Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); David M. Crump, *Jesus the Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts* (Mohr Siebeck, 2019).



demonstrate. As far as the evidence suggests, Mark's record of Jesus of Nazareth addressing Yahweh the covenant God of the Old Testament as Αββα ὁ πατήρ is the first time anyone had ever been recorded as addressing Yahweh in this manner.<sup>481</sup> This is a radical claim that if demonstrated as true, has groundbreaking implications for subsequent approaches to and treatment of the Gospels. The implications of this point will be discussed more in this chapter and the next. For now, the significant discovery is that Jesus' prayer in Mark 14:36 employing the Aramaic Αββα as a direct address of Yahweh and transmitted by the Gospel author as the bilingual phrase Αββα ὁ πατήρ represents the earliest explicit instance of Jesus' addressing God as Αββα and serves as the foundation for grasping this concept in the Gospels and the New Testament.<sup>482</sup>

One question that arises here is why Mark would include what appears to be an explanatory comment translating the Aramaic Αββα with the Greek ὁ πατήρ. The relevant linguistic discussion of why this phrase is transmitted in this manner will be addressed later on. For now, Mark's bilingual usage will briefly be explored. Mark's retention of Abba is his attempt at transmitting the most authentic and original presentation of Jesus of Nazareth as possible to his primarily Greek-speaking audience. Αββα was such a significant and unprecedented approach to God by Jesus that merely translating it to Father using the Greek ὁ πατήρ was not sufficient to capture the essence and nuance of Jesus' usage of this Aramaic term. Rather, even to those whose primary language was not Aramaic, the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus was

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<sup>481</sup> This study has argued that the original Aramaic Abba stands behind the majority of instances in each of the Gospels where the Greek πατήρ is employed. However, this is the first and only time the Aramaic word is directly utilized in the Gospels.

<sup>482</sup> Caulley address this topic at length in mark's Gospel and specifically this usage in Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: Thomas Scott Caulley, "The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32, no. 4 (2022): 394–416.

retained through the employment of the Aramaic אבבא.<sup>483</sup> Taylor affirms this, noting the most like possibility that, “The addition of ὁ πατήρ in Mark can hardly be an explanatory comment of Mark himself, since it is present also in Romans and Galatians, and must be either a primitive liturgical formula in a bilingual Church or the usage of Jesus himself.”<sup>484</sup> A case has been presented based upon the historical, cultural, linguistic, and theological evidence that the usage and retention of Abba within the Greek-speaking communities as evidenced by the immediate translation of Αββα ὁ πατήρ represents Jesus’ own usage and the authentic words of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>485</sup> As an extensive study on the topic and defense of the position affirmed here, Cobb concluded,<sup>486</sup> “Jesus spoke to God as ‘Abba’ and taught the disciples to address God in that way.”<sup>487</sup>

The theological implications of not only Jesus’ use of Abba for God but also His invitation for His disciples to follow His example will be treated in the next chapter. To suffice for now, Mark’s extremely early attestation of Jesus’ use of Αββα ὁ πατήρ in the context of

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<sup>483</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57; Grassi, *Abba’, Father*, 449.

<sup>484</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 553

<sup>485</sup> Gupta makes a fascinating and insightful addition to the discussion supported by scholarly opinion that: “Most scholars believe that Jesus would have been able to speak and understand three languages (though with varying degrees of skill). Aramaic would have been the language that Jesus used with other Jews in conversation. Greek would have been employed in interactions with gentiles. Hebrew would have been used in worship, at least in part; see Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 100.” Nijay K. Gupta, “The Babylonian Talmud and Mark 14:26– 52: Abba, Father!,” In, *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism*, edited by Ben C. Blackwell, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 224.

<sup>486</sup> John Cobb is another serious scholar who affirms that Jesus spoke Aramaic and Abba was not a rare address employed by Him merely in Mark 14 but was His common approach to God as Father. Cobb devotes an entire work to this topic and this serves as a helpful affirmation of Jeremias’ claims and the perspective and approach held by this study. For Cobb’s work, see: John B. Cobb, *Jesus’ Abba: The God Who Has Not Failed* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016). Cobb writes, “The New Testament was written in Greek; so the word used for father is *Pater*. Although Jesus probably knew some Greek, we can assume that he taught the common people in Galilee in Aramaic. Almost certainly his own life of prayer with God was in Aramaic. The Aramaic word for father was *abba*. Jesus spoke to God as ‘Abba’ and taught the disciples to address God in that way.”

<sup>487</sup> John B. Cobb, *Jesus’ Abba: The God Who has Not Failed* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 36.

prayer supports the thesis of this study that Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father especially as revealed most clearly in prayer serves as the hermeneutical key to His teaching on prayer in the New Testament marked by unprecedented intimacy and access to God as Αββα ο πατήρ.<sup>488</sup>

*Jesus' and His Disciples' Father in Mark's Gospel*

Mark provides three other references to God as Father by Jesus. Two of these reference God as Jesus' personal Father, and once as the Father of His disciples.<sup>489</sup> In Mark 8:38, when speaking of His return, Jesus refers to Himself as "The Son of Man" who will return in "the glory of his Father." Mark 13:32 resembles this usage when once again speaking of the coming of the Son of Man (13:24-28), Jesus notes that no one, including the angels in heaven nor Himself as the Son but only "the Father" knows the day of His coming. Whereas Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane highlighted the intimacy and access that He enjoyed with His Father, these two references stress the unique role Jesus bears as the unique Son of God as an affirmation and support for His divinity.<sup>490</sup>

Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God is one of Mark's primary themes and emphases in His Gospel from start to finish and Jesus' direct appeal to Yahweh as His Father in these contexts affirms this.<sup>491</sup> Briefly, Mark opens His Gospel by affirming the deity and sonship of

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<sup>488</sup> Gupta supports these claims as yet another scholarly witness to the reality that Jesus lived, ministered, and spoke primarily in Aramaic and Abba was such a significant element of His teaching and revelation concerning God as Father that it left an indelible mark upon His disciples. For this position, see: Nijay K. Gupta, "The Babylonian Talmud and Mark 14:26–52: Abba, Father!," In, *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism*, edited by Ben C. Blackwell, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

<sup>489</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 89.

<sup>490</sup> Caulley' work emphasizes the centrality of Jesus' identity as the Son of God in Mark's Gospel as one of the author's primary emphases and themes. Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology*, 399.

<sup>491</sup> For a helpful resource exploring Mark's Gospel against the Jewish and Second Temple background, see: Ben C. Blackwell John K. Goodrich, Jason Maston, and N. T. Wright, *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2018).

Jesus, ‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ (1:1). At Jesus’ baptism, He is affirmed by God himself and claimed as Yahweh’s Son when a voice came from heaven declaring, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (1:11). Similarly, at Jesus’ transfiguration, the Father comes once again to affirm and validate Jesus’ divinity and unique identity as the Son by declaring, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him” (9:7). Finally, just as Mark opened His Gospel with a declaration of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, at the end of His ministry, the Roman centurion at the foot of the cross echoes the Father’s affirmation of the Son declaring, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (15:39). Thus, “The designation Son of God or Son is thus linked with key moments in the life of Jesus—baptism, transfiguration, death. From beginning to end he is Son of God, the Beloved.”<sup>492</sup>

This material is insightful for understanding Jesus’ address of Yahweh as Αββα ὁ πατήρ. This background must be integrated into the exegetical analysis of Jesus’ use of Father language for Yahweh because one of the primary elements of this is highlighting Jesus’ unique role as the singular Son of Yahweh. If the only examples in Mark’s Gospel of Father language for Yahweh outside of Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane were concerning His exclusive identity as the Son of God, then Αββα ὁ πατήρ would be a prayer only He could pray. However, what is explicit in Matthew and Luke’s Gospel, that believers are not only permitted but instructed to address Yahweh both as Father and with an unprecedented intimacy and access made possible through the cry of Αββα ὁ πατήρ, is also present here in Mark’s Gospel.

Against the backdrop of Jesus’ unique identity as the Son of God and the Father’s repeated affirmation of Him comes Jesus’ unprecedented revelation that Yahweh is not merely His Father but also the Father of His disciples and they are welcome to address Him as such. The

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<sup>492</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 91.

context of this text in Mark is significant for as has been asserted time and time again throughout this dissertation, it is in and through Jesus' own prayers and His instruction on prayer that this revelation of God as Abba Father is made explicit. The text is found in Mark 11, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:24-25 ESV) What makes this example so momentous is that Jesus invites disciples to share in His relationship with the Father as His sons and daughters and through Him, disciples can also call out, Αββα ὁ πατήρ. That is, "Jesus is thus recognized as both the recipient of God's end-time immanence and the facilitator of that closeness for his followers."<sup>493</sup> Here, Jesus makes explicit that believers are invited approach God as their Father in the context of prayer following both Jesus' personal example and now, His direct instruction.

The connection between this injunction concerning believers' intimacy and access with God as Abba Father most clearly portrayed through the New Covenant's invitation to address Him as such through prayer links this instructive text here in Mark 11 with Jesus' Gethsemane text in Mark 14. Jesus set the example of a perfect Son living in uninhibited familial intimacy and connection with God as His Father and invited His disciples to do the same. To quote Caulley once more, "Notice the resonance with Jesus's use of Abba, indicative of his relationship with the Father, of which he is both recipient and facilitator."<sup>494</sup> The implications of these

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<sup>493</sup> Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology*, 403. The context for this quote is the following, "The 'tearing open' of the heavens (*schizein* Mark 1:10) is mirrored in Mark 15:38, where the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom (*schizein*). This tearing of the curtain symbolizes the new eschatological opening of believers' access to heaven/God through Jesus's ministry, made possible by his death. Jesus is thus recognized as both the recipient of God's end-time immanence and the facilitator of that closeness for his followers."

<sup>494</sup> Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology*, 403

findings will be explored further in the next section concerning the monumental development in the approach to prayer made by the New Testament and Jesus Himself. However, the primary theological point that arises from Mark 11:24-25 is that Jesus invites believers to address His God and their God as Αββα ο πατήρ and to follow His example in enjoying unprecedented intimacy and access to God as His child.

### **God as Father in the Gospel of Matthew (Part 1)**

This biblical-theological survey of Jesus' theology of God as Father continues in Matthew's Gospel. As was done in Mark's Gospel, this approach will focus on evaluating Jesus' teaching on prayer and the content of His own prayers where God as Father is the significant theological foundation. While this theme is significant in each of the synoptic Gospels, it is especially significant in the Gospel of Matthew. Of the one hundred and seventy times the word Father appears on the lips of Jesus in reference to God, at least forty-two of these appear in Matthew's Gospel. This is second only to John's Gospel where Father takes an even more central role with one hundred and nine appearances.<sup>495</sup> Compared to the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew uses Father language for God more than Mark and Luke combined.<sup>496</sup> Thus, the Fatherhood of God is a central theological tenet in the personal life and ministry of the Lord Jesus and also in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew's Gospel is addressed second because there is general scholarly consensus that while Matthew and Luke both used Mark as a primary source of material when composing their Gospel accounts, Matthew's Gospel predates Luke's.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> In a study concerning Father language for God in Matthew's Gospel and the Synoptics, Liangyan Ge has slightly higher numbers for Father language in reference to God. In the Synoptics, he notes that there are between 44-45 usages in Matthew, 15-17 in Luke, and 4 in Mark. Liangyan Ge, "Father/Father in Matthew." *Paragraph 15*, no. 3 (1992): 263.

<sup>496</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 105.

<sup>497</sup> For a defense of this position, see: Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022).

Due to the sheer frequency of usage in Matthew's Gospel and the Gospels as a whole, preference of exegetical analysis will be given to the most pertinent texts for this study. These are specifically the texts where either God is addressed as Father in relation to prayer which is the exegetical heart of this study or where Christ's teaching on prayer expands or develops the Old Testament idea; especially when Yahweh is addressed as Father directly or Christians are clearly instructed to do so. This evaluation of Jesus' theology of God as Father in the Gospel of Matthew will begin by evaluating His teaching on prayer and the content of His own prayers where God as Father is a significant theme. Therefore, this survey begins with the foundational texts in the Sermon on the Mount where all of Jesus' teaching concerning prayer is rooted in the centrality of God as Father (See Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 14–15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11) and then progresses to other significant examples in the life and teaching of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

Having laid a theological foundation for Jesus' unique approach to God as Father and especially distinctive in His revolutionary use of Abba for God the Father, a few key examples will now be examined where the Fatherhood of God is significant for understanding Jesus' teaching on prayer and the content of His own prayers. The first two are contained in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and are his teaching concerning genuine Christian piety (2–18) and the Lord's prayer (9-13), His most significant prayer given as a template for His disciples to follow. In Jesus' teaching on genuine Christian spirituality, He addresses the three chief acts of Jewish piety, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.<sup>498</sup> The goal here is not a detailed exegesis of each reference. Rather, the aim is to explore the significance of God as Father

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<sup>498</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 236.

(πατήρ, אבא) in all of Jesus' teachings on Christian piety and especially on prayer which receives the most attention in this account.<sup>499</sup>

*Christian Piety, The Lord's Prayer, And Jesus' Abba Cry*

Matthew 5:48 ends with the charge to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” In 6:1, when the Lord Jesus charges believers to “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven,” He places the entire discourse in the context of a relationship with God as Father.<sup>500</sup> Each of the false approaches to piety is corrected by the revelation of God as Father and the disciple's proper relationship with Him as such.<sup>501</sup> In addressing three foundational Jewish acts of piety, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, in each instance, He charges His disciples to not be like “the hypocrites” (6:2, 5, 16; also 15:7; 22:18; 23:13–29; 24:51).<sup>502</sup>

Two principles emerge here and in each of the following instances in Matthew 6. First, “Jesus insists on the importance of a deep sincerity in those who follow him.”<sup>503</sup> Jesus' primary purpose in each of these exhortations on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting is to foster authentic, genuine, holy, and pure piety in His followers. Second and significant for our discussion here, the motivation behind this behavior in His disciples flowed a proper understanding of God as Father and the disciples' relationship to Him as such. Christ's disciples were to live to “impress

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<sup>499</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 99.

<sup>500</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 236.

<sup>501</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids; Leicester: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 139.

<sup>502</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Matthew, Vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 6:1.

<sup>503</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 135.



God alone.”<sup>504</sup> Not only God vaguely or generically, but in every instance here, they were to live for the glory and pleasure of “your Father” (both singular and plural).<sup>505</sup>

The theological significance of this development is difficult to fully express. In these instances, based upon the thorough survey of Old Testament texts and relevant Jewish literature, the Lord Jesus is practicing and teaching something that no Jew before him had ever dared to.<sup>506</sup> Based upon the evidence presented in this study, it is not an overstatement to claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the first person to ever understand themselves as not only the general and corporate son of God based upon covenant or ethnic status but also the personal and intimate Son of God with the access and intimacy that this relationship includes. Not only this but as was seen in Mark’s Gospel, there was no historical or theological precedence for Jesus teaching His disciples to live not just for their corporate Father but to teach them to relate to and address Yahweh as their personal and individual Father. What is emerging is that Jesus’ unique relationship with God as Father and His teaching for His disciples to address and relate to Him as such is one of the most revolutionary elements of His life and teaching. If Jesus had merely taught His disciples that Yahweh was the corporate Father of Israel based upon their covenant with Him, He would have been in direct continuity with the Old Testament revelation. However, by teaching His disciples that Yahweh is their personal and individual Father by using the second person singular, ὁ Πατήρ σου, (Matthew 6:4, 6:6 (2x), 6:17 (2x)), Jesus broke social, historical,

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<sup>504</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, Mt 6:1.

<sup>505</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 108-110.

<sup>506</sup> This concept has been most famously explored and defended by Joachim Jeremias as has been thoroughly discussed and presented in this study. To test this claim, see his work, Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967).

and religious norms in addressing Yahweh in this manner and teaching His disciples to do so as well.<sup>507</sup>

This will become even clearer when the Lord's Prayer in this immediate context of Matthew 6 and later in Luke 11 is addressed. What is beginning to emerge here, an understanding of Yahweh as both the corporate and personal and intimate Father of believers, will be made explicit when Jesus teaches His disciples that they are to address Him as such.<sup>508</sup> As has been repeatedly argued and affirmed, there truly is nothing comparable to Christ's approach to Yahweh as His and His disciple's Abba Father.<sup>509</sup> This truly is one of the distinctive elements of Christ's New Covenant with His people. This will continue to be demonstrated throughout the Gospels as this point will become overwhelmingly decisive. Thus, as Jesus' use of Father language and His teaching that His disciples are to address Him individually as their personal Father is examined, Geffre's conclusion is insightful in affirming the unprecedented and novel nature of this approach, "The name 'Father' is the one best calculated to manifest the novelty of the God of Jesus, as compared not only with the God of the Greeks but with the God of the Jews. Compared with the God of Israel the God of Jesus represents a revolution in so far as God is the God of grace before being the God of the law."<sup>510</sup>

Concerning the significance of the development of this theme and Christ's revelation of the disciples' relationship to "your father" both singular and plural, France notes that,

In the phrase 'your Father' in Matthew the 'your' is normally plural; only here and in vv. 6 and 18 is it singular, because the scene has been set up in terms of the individual

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<sup>507</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 106.

<sup>508</sup> Gerhard Kittel, "Αββᾶ," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–), 6.

<sup>509</sup> Kittel, *Αββᾶ*, 1:6; Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba*, 497; Verbrugge, *Αββᾶ*, 1.

<sup>510</sup> Claude Geffre, "Father as the Proper Name of God," in *God as Father?* Ed. Johannes Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 44.

disciple's private relationship with God. That God 'sees in secret' reflects the OT understanding that nothing is hidden from him, expressed so eloquently in Ps 139; cf. Deut 29:29; Ps 90:8; Qoh 12:14; Jer 23:24; Sir 17:15–20; 23:18–19.<sup>511</sup>

Therefore, the reality that Abba sees in secret and will surely reward His sons and daughters is the Christian's motivation for genuine acts of love, service, and piety.<sup>512</sup> This is true for all of their righteousness in general (6:1), their almsgiving (6:4), prayer (6:6, 8), and fasting (6:18). For Jesus, Yahweh's identity as Abba Father is the hermeneutical key to all of His instruction concerning genuine and authentic Christian piety, especially regarding prayer. Jesus devotes the most time to the topic of prayer and instructing His disciples in the proper manner to approach God the Father in prayer. Once again, both Jesus' instruction on Christian prayer against the prayers of the "hypocrites" and the "Gentiles" and His model prayer for His disciples are rooted in a proper theology of God as Father.<sup>513</sup> In affirmation of the claims made by this study previously, Carson makes insightful remarks concerning the significance of this teaching and revelation of God as Father as truly unique to the teaching and ministry of the Lord Jesus. He notes that, "The fatherhood of God is not a central theme in the Old Testament. Where 'father' does occur with respect to God, it is commonly by way of analogy, not direct address (Dt 32:6; Ps 103:13; Isa 63:16; Mal 2:10)... But not until Jesus is it characteristic to address God as 'Father.'" <sup>514</sup> Any informed reader aware of the pertinent backgrounds from the ANE, the Old

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<sup>511</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 262-263.

<sup>512</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 138–139.

<sup>513</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, Mt 6:5-13.

<sup>514</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 243. Carson continues, "One can also find occasional references to God as father in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Tob 13:4; Sir 23:1; 51:10; Wis 2:16; 14:3; Jub. 1:24–25, 28; T. Levi 18:6; T. Jud. 24:2— though some of these may be Christian interpolations). There is but one instance in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 9:35); the assorted rabbinic references are relatively rare and few unambiguously antedate Jesus (b. Ta'an. 25b; the fifth and sixth petitions of the Eighteen Benedictions). Pagans likewise on occasion addressed their gods as father, e.g., Zeu pater ("Zeus, Father"; Lat. Jupiter)."

Testament, the Jewish Second Temple writings, and the first-century context can see clearly how distinct Jesus' conception of and approach to God as Abba Father was. It is undeniable as the Gospels demonstrate and the rest of the New Testament testifies that God as Abba Father was one of the central messages and theological components of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. This is illustrated most clearly in the content of His own prayers and His didactic teaching concerning prayer.

*The Lord's Prayer: Approaching Jesus' and His Disciple's Abba*

While all of the material surveyed thus far has been relevant, by far the most significant example provided by Jesus concerning the Fatherhood of God and the most theologically weighty element of teaching given by Him to his disciples is contained in the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. This teaching by Jesus and His personal example in prayer are foundational concerning both God's identity as Abba Father and second, the intimacy and access which God as Abba provides in the lives of believers.<sup>515</sup> If the only material available is that which was already surveyed in Mark and Matthew's Gospels, the reader may have the impression that Jesus alone has God as His Abba Father and believers relate to God generally through Him but not as His own children. However, the Lord's prayer makes explicit that the same relationship that Jesus enjoys with God as His Abba is not only available for His disciples but is meant to be the normative and fixed approach to God for His disciples.

In the Matthean account, the Lord's prayer is included in Christ's extensive discourse concerning the nature of true religion and how the children of God are to live within the new covenant (Matthew 6:11-14). This is significant for as has been affirmed throughout all Christian

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<sup>515</sup> For a study which affirms this claim that believers are to follow Christ's example and relate to God as Abba Father just as He did through the new covenant, see: Paul Kenneth Moser, "Jesus and Abba in Gethsemane: A Center in Filial Cooperation." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 15, no. 1 (2021).

history, the Lord Jesus gave this prayer to His disciples as the normative and expected practice for their relationship to God. Luke's account adds another significant element, for the Lord's Prayer is initiated by Jesus' disciples' request for Him to teach them how to pray as they observed His example. Thus, when considering both accounts together, believers follow not only the teaching of Christ concerning prayer but they also follow His personal example and approach to Yahweh through prayer. What is of significance to this study is that the Lord's prayer contains the direct address of Yahweh as Father. The central element of New Testament prayer is foreign to the Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish contexts. Jesus invited all of his disciples to do what no Jew dared to do in the Old Covenant; address Yahweh directly and intimately as Father. The Lord's prayer emboldened Jesus' followers and granted them unprecedented access to Yahweh as Abba Father.

The familiar opening line of the prayer is as follows: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου.) (Matthew 6:9 ESV/NA 28). In Luke's version, "Father, hallowed be your name"<sup>516</sup> (Πάτερ, ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου) (Luke 11:2 ESV/NA 28). While there are a plethora of significant theological issues that could be addressed in the Lord's prayer, this study must narrow its scope and focus only on the novelty of Jesus' address of God as Father as well as the significance that He invites His disciples to do the same.<sup>517</sup> One of the major views of this study as presented and defended thoroughly in the

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<sup>516</sup> There is an interesting textual critical issue in this text. Some manuscripts add an additional phrase which aligns Luke's transmission of the lord's prayer with Matthew's. However, others contain this shorter and more concise version. Concerning this, the NET translators make the following insightful Text Critical Note, "Most mss, including later majority (A C D W Θ Ψ 070 f13 33vid M it), add ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς "our [Father] in heaven") here. This makes the prayer begin like the version in Matt 6:9. The shorter version is read by P75 & B (L: + ἡμῶν) 1 700 as well as some versions and fathers. Given this more weighty external evidence, combined with the scribal tendency to harmonize Gospel parallels, the shorter reading is preferred." NET Bible, Biblical Studies Press, Text Critical Note, Luke 11:2.

<sup>517</sup> The Lord's prayer will be treated in the discussion of Luke's Gospel as well. There are so many significant recent works dealing with the Lord's prayer which can be accessed for study of Jesus' most famous prayer: Clifton C. Black, *The Lord's Prayer* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018); Stephen

previous section, is that behind the vocative Greek Πάτερ in both Matthew and Luke’s accounts is the intimate and familial Aramaic *Abba*. Once again, this is not a minority view but as Caulley notes,

Many scholars have accepted the judgment that Jesus’s *Abba* is represented by Luke’s ‘Father’ in the address of God in the Lord’s Prayer (the ‘Our Father’: πάτερ [Luke 11:2]; cf. πάτερ ἡμῶν, “our Father,” [Matt 6:9]). Moreover, while neither Matthew nor Luke record Jesus’s Aramaic word, *Abba*, in contrast to Mark they both use the vocative form πάτερ (O Father) in their versions of Jesus’s prayer to the Father in Gethsemane’ (πάτερ, ‘O Father,’ Luke 22:42; πάτερ μου, ‘my Father,’ Matt 26:49).<sup>518</sup>

The fact that there is a large consensus of scholars who affirm this position is tremendous for the claims of this dissertation hang on the fact that Jesus not only employed *Abba* Father as a direct address for Yahweh personally but also instructed His disciples to do the same. The NET Bible translators affirm this position, concluding concerning both Matthew and Luke’s versions of the Lord’s prayer concerning the vocative that, “God is addressed in terms of intimacy (Father). The original Semitic term here was probably *Abba*.”<sup>519</sup> One of Jeremiah’s primary points was that

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H. Shoemaker, *Finding Jesus in His Prayers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004); Justo L. Gonzalez, *Teach Us to Pray: The Lord’s Prayer in the Early Church and Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020); David Clark, *On Earth as in Heaven: The Lord’s Prayer from Jewish Prayer to Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017); Jeffrey B. Gibson, *The Disciples’ Prayer: The Prayer Jesus Taught in Its Historical Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015); John Gavin, *The Mysteries of the Lord’s Prayer: Wisdom from the Early Church* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021); Timothy E. Mills, “The Significance of the Lord’s Prayer for Understanding the New Testament Today,” *Evangelical Theological Society*, (2002), 1-20; Paul Murray, *Praying With Confidence: Aquinas on the Lord’s Prayer* (London: Continuum, 2010); N.T. Wright, “Lord and His Prayer.” *Anglican Journal: National Newspaper of the Anglican Church of Canada = Journal épiscopal*. 124, no. 3 (1998); Clifton C. Black, “The Religious World of the Lord’s Prayer.” *Review and expositor*. 118, no. 4 (2021): 421–441; Jan Milic Lochman, *The Lord’s Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990); J. H. Mazaheri, *Calvin’s Interpretation of ‘the Lord’s Prayer’. A Rhetorical Approach* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2017); Charles Nathan Ridlehoover, *The Lord’s Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel* (London: T & T Clark, 2020); Philip Graham Ryken, *The Prayer of Our Lord* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).

<sup>518</sup> Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark’s Christology*, 397.

<sup>519</sup> NET Bible, Biblical Studies Press, Study Note, Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2. Concerning both usages of *Abba* as the opening line of the Lord’s prayer in the vocative, the translators continue affirming the perspective of this study that, “The term is a little unusual in a personal prayer to God. Although it is a term of endearment used in the family circle, it is not the exact equivalent of ‘Daddy’ (as is sometimes popularly suggested). However, it does suggest a close, familial relationship.”

“Jewish prayers on the one hand do not contain a single example of 'abba' as an address for God. Jesus, on the other hand, always used it when he prayed (with the exception of the cry from the cross, Mark 15:34).”<sup>520</sup> Thus, there is ample evidence to support this claim and affirm that behind the vocatives Πάτερ ἡμῶν and Πάτερ in Matthew and Luke’s accounts of the Lord’s Prayer is Jesus’ original employment of the Aramaic Abba.<sup>521</sup> This is a foundational conclusion to this study whose implications will continue to be explored in this chapter and more comprehensively in the next.

Concerning the grammatical support for this view, which was addressed in the previous chapter, Szymik makes a helpful and informative contribution to the discussion that,

The Greek transcription proves that in the case of ἀββα (*status determinatus* or *emphaticus*, reduplication of the consonant *bet*: אבבא) we are dealing with a vocative: the Aramaic *Abba* means ‘Father!’ The nominative ὁ πατήρ should be translated in a similar way – as the vocative ‘Father!’ This grammatical change (nominative instead of a vocative) is attested in Greek *koine*, and a perfect illustration of this phenomenon is the priestly prayer of Jesus (John 17).<sup>522</sup>

Therefore, concerning the parallel presentations of the Lord’s prayer by Matthew and Luke, a few major conclusions emerge. First, there is sufficient historical and linguistic evidence to support the position of this study that behind the Greek Πάτερ ἡμῶν and Πάτερ in Matthew and

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<sup>520</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 69.

<sup>521</sup> In support of Cauley’s claim that “Many scholars have accepted the judgment that Jesus’s *Abba* is represented by” both Matthew and Luke’s ‘Father’ in the “address of God in the Lord’s Prayer,” the following works which were utilized in the previous chapter are referenced once again. Each of these authors affirms the basic proposition that Jesus’ regularly employed *Abba* as His primary direct address of God as Father and especially here in the Lord’s prayer: Kittel, *Ἀββᾶ*, 1:6; Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 11-57, *Idem.*, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*, 63-75; Szymik, *Jesus’ Intitulation of God as Abba*, 494; Verbrugge, *Ἀββᾶ*, 1; Schelbert, *Abba Vater*; Cobb, *Jesus’ Abba*; Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 2. This list is nowhere near exhaustive, but is a mere attempt to affirm Cauley’s claim that there is sufficient scholarly attestation to this view to render it credible.

<sup>522</sup> Szymik, *Jesus’ Intitulation of God as Abba*, 492. Szymik continues by expanding his discussion noting that, “It is worth noting that the Greek language has the diminutive *πάπας* (deminutivum from *πατήρ*) – ‘dad, daddy, papa’; but, the Christian community did not use this word to render Jesus’ ἀββα.” For further defense of this, see: G. Schelbert, *Abba Vater. Der literarische Befund vom Altaramäischen bis zu den späten Midrasch- und Haggada-Werken in Auseinandersetzung mit den Thesen von Joachim Jeremias*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011).

Luke's accounts of the Lord's prayer is Jesus' original employment of the Aramaic Abba.<sup>523</sup> This means that all of the relevant historical, cultural, linguistic, and theological implications from the previous chapter's analysis of Abba Father apply to the Lord's prayer, Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, and as Kittel affirmed, in each instance where the Evangelists record Him as saying "ὁ πατήρ, πάτερ, ὁ πατήρ μου, πάτερ μου, and even perhaps πάτερ ἡμῶν," for underlying each of these was the Aramaic Abba.<sup>524</sup>

Second, the claim that Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father is unprecedented when compared to the Old Testament and Jewish literature is not only affirmed by the Lord's prayer but actually demonstrates an even further expansion of this theme. There is no evidence that anyone ever demonstrated the intimacy with Yahweh as their Abba Father or even dared to claim such access to Him as Jesus of Nazareth. Against the cultural and religious background, Jesus' personal approach to Yahweh was at the least, unprecedented and at the most, blasphemous for the period. Finally, the fact that Jesus employed the intimate and familial term Abba and invited His disciples to do the same is the ultimate affirmation of the claims of this study. As T. F. Torrance writes:

When we turn to the Scriptures of the New Testament, we find a radical deepening of the Old Testament doctrine of God, for 'Father' is now revealed to be more than an epithet—it is the personal name of God in which the form and content of his self-revelation as

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<sup>523</sup> A "Study Note" from the NET bible translators contains the following and insightful addition to this studies discussion on Abba: "The term 'Abba' is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic אבא ('abba'), literally meaning 'my father' but taken over simply as 'father,' used in prayer and in the family circle, and later taken over by the early Greek-speaking Christians (BDAG 1 s.v. ἄββα). This Aramaic word is found three times in the New Testament (Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), and in each case is followed by its Greek equivalent, which is translated 'father.' It is a term expressing warm affection and filial confidence. It has no perfect equivalent in English. It has passed into European languages as an ecclesiastical term, 'abbot.' Over the past fifty years a lot has been written about this term and Jesus' use of it. Joachim Jeremias argued that Jesus routinely addressed God using this Aramaic word, and he also noted this was a 'child's word,' leading many to conclude its modern equivalent was 'Daddy.' This conclusion Jeremias soon modified (the term on occasion is used of an adult son addressing his father) but the simplistic equation of abba with 'Daddy' is still heard in some circles today. Nevertheless, the term does express a high degree of closeness with reverence, and in addition to the family circle could be used by disciples of a much loved and revered teacher."

<sup>524</sup> Kittel, *Abba*, 6.



Father through Jesus Christ his Son are inseparable. 'Father' is now the name of God that we are to hallow, as our Lord Jesus taught us: 'Our *Father* who art in heaven, *hallowed* be your *name*.'<sup>525</sup>

Another relevant Matthean text in Christ's Sermon on the Mount is His teaching concerning bold, confident, persistent prayer in Matthew 7:7-11. This text is especially significant for the thesis of this dissertation for it places prayer within the intimate and familial context of God as Abba Father and demonstrates that Jesus' disciples are granted the same intimacy and access with God as their Abba Father as Christ enjoyed. Christ opens with the bold, open-ended invitation for His disciples to pray to the Father with the same intimacy, access, and confidence that He emulated in His own prayers, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8 ESV).

The entire exhortation to prayer is placed within the context of God as Father and Jesus' disciples approaching Him as His children. This text will be addressed directly in its Lukan version. For now, Jesus' point is that if even evil earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, "How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11). There are a few profound points established by Jesus in this text. First, in an unprecedented and unparalleled manner when compared with the Old Testament and Jewish background, Jesus places prayer within the context of familial intimacy. Just as in the Lord's prayer, all of His disciples have access to Yahweh as their Abba Father. Second, because of this radical development of believers' access to God as their Abba Father, New Covenant prayer is profoundly and categorically transformed by Jesus' relationship with and revelation of

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<sup>525</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father," in Alvin F. Kimel, *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992), 131.

God as His and His disciples' Abba Father. There is no didactic teaching or such widespread invitation to approach God with one's requests with the assurance and confidence that He will answer in the Old Covenant. However, because of the life and ministry of Jesus the Son, He has opened access for all of His disciples to know and enjoy God as Abba just as He did. As

Thompson notes,

Jesus' boldness lay not in speaking to God as Father, but in promising others, on God's behalf, that God would be their Father. The promise that God was and would be a merciful and faithful Father is one way in which Jesus articulates his conviction of God's saving purposes for Israel and the world, which are to be embodied in his (filial) mission and subsequently also through those who follow him.<sup>526</sup>

Therefore, while it will be treated more fully in the subsequent section, Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7 affirms the major tenets of this study that Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father especially as revealed most clearly in prayer serves as the hermeneutical key to His teaching on prayer in the New Testament marked by unprecedented intimacy and access to God as Αββα ὁ πατήρ.

*Summary: Jesus and Prayer in Matthew's Gospel*

Three major points can be deduced from Jesus' teaching on prayer here in Matthew 6 coupled with the revelation of God as Abba Father in the Lord's prayer.

First, made most explicitly clear in the introduction to the Lord's prayer, the intimate and familial relationship which Christ the Son of God shared with His Abba is also the relationship His disciples are to enjoy with Him.<sup>527</sup> The reality that the Lord Jesus invited His disciples to call upon God and relate to him as "Abba" just as he did was "virtually unparalleled in first-century Judaism."<sup>528</sup> As sons and daughters of the Father, disciples have the same access to Him that

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<sup>526</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 86.

<sup>527</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 269.

<sup>528</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 101.

Christ did. Second, disciples' relationship to God as Abba includes both an intimate relationship with Him where He knows and cares for all of their needs as well as an intimate communion where they share deep fellowship and communion with the Father.<sup>529</sup> The Father knows every need the disciple has before they even ask Him (6:8). He has promised to graciously and generously provide for every disciple as His own sons and daughters.<sup>530</sup> Not only does the Father offer His gracious provision and protection for His disciples, but even greater than this, He offers Himself for "God himself is the reward of Christians."<sup>531</sup> Sons and daughters of Abba have access not only to his hand for provision but also to His face for intimate communion, relationship, fellowship, and friendship. Jesus' instruction for His disciples to address His Abba as "Our Father,"

Implies intimate communion. Effective prayer is not a complex ritual but a simple cry of faith predicated on an assured relationship (7:7–11). The earnest brevity and simplicity of this prayer fits not the cry of the complacent and the self-satisfied, but that of the humble, the lowly, the broken, the desperate. This is the prayer of those who have nowhere to turn but to God—the 'meek' who 'will inherit the earth' (5:5).<sup>532</sup>

Finally, later in the Gospel, Jesus' repeated Abba cry in Matthew 26:39 and 42 reveals the depth of relationship and intimacy Christ enjoyed with His Father and that which His disciples are invited to join in.<sup>533</sup> Whereas Matthew uses the Greek Father, "Mark preserves the Aramaic Abba."<sup>534</sup> In Christ's most severe test of obedience, as He wrestles with the will of God which

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<sup>529</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, Mt 6:9–13.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>531</sup> R. Gutzwiller, *Day by Day with Saint Matthew's Gospel* (London, 1964), 91.

<sup>532</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, Mt 6:9–13.

<sup>533</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 945-949.

<sup>534</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 673.

would ultimately lead him to a cross, the Lord Jesus calls upon His Abba in His greatest time of need for comfort, strength, and deliverance. The parallel to this text was treated at length in the previous survey of Mark. What is significant to note here is that just as was the case with the Lord's prayer in Luke 11 and Matthew 6, here too there is significant historical and linguistic evidence supporting the claim that the original word employed by Jesus was the Aramaic Abba.<sup>535</sup> Once again, Jesus' life and theology were permeated with the conception of God as Abba Father for Himself and all believers, and this is illustrated most clearly in the content of His own prayers and His didactic teaching concerning prayer.

Of the utmost significance is that this approach to God not only as Father but specifically as "Abba" is continued in the early church and the New Testament writings (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). The development of this theme and usage in the New Testament will be treated further later in this chapter. For now, Christ's invitation for His disciples to address Yahweh as Abba Father means that the same intimacy and access that Jesus enjoyed with the Father is now to be experienced by His disciples. Part of the scandalously Good News of the Gospel is that in Christ, all disciples are children of God and have access to him as their Abba Father.

What Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount He lived in the Garden of Gethsemane as an example for all of His disciples to follow. The Lord Jesus' intimacy with and dependence upon His Abba is the pattern for all generations of Abba's sons and daughters to follow. This is the wonderful privilege and overwhelming beauty of what Christ revealed in His teaching and through His very own life. The covenant God of the Old Testament is the disciple's Abba Father. Disciples have the same access to Abba that the Lord Jesus had and can approach Him, enjoy

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<sup>535</sup> Schelbert, *Abba Vater*; Cobb, *Jesus' Abba*; Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology*, 396-397; Kittel, *Ἀββᾶ*, 1:6; Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba*, 497; Verbrugge, *Ἀββᾶ*, 1; Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 2.

Him, and depend upon Him confidently as His sons and daughters. The Lord Jesus set the supreme example to follow in approaching God as Abba. May His disciples hear His voice speak to them as He did to Mary as He assures that He goes “to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17).<sup>536</sup>

## **Section 2: God as Father in Jesus’ Teaching in Matthew’s Gospel (Part 2)**

Having established a theological foundation for understanding Jesus’ use of Abba in His prayers and His teaching on prayer, we now briefly address the twenty-plus times Jesus referred to God as Father in His teaching in the Gospel of Matthew. Once again, the goal is not a detailed or direct exegetical treatment of each text. Rather, the aim is a survey of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew’s Gospel where His theology of God as Father is present in the attempt at developing a biblical theology of God as Abba in the life and ministry of Jesus from a Matthean perspective.

### *God as Father in Jesus’ Teaching in the Sermon on the Mount*

Whereas Jesus’ use of Father for God was addressed in His personal prayers and His teaching concerning Christian piety, now this will be examined in other teaching sections in the Sermon on the Mount where Father plays a prominent role.<sup>537</sup> In addition to the material already discussed, three times in chapter five (5:16, 45, 48), four times in chapter six (6:14-15, 26, 32), and two times in chapter seven (7:11, 21), Jesus refers to God as Father as the theological key to understanding His unique teaching and the hermeneutical foundation for these texts. In each of

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<sup>536</sup> An interesting work which deals with understanding Jesus’ identity as the Son of God based upon the Father’s words spoken to him, see, Francois Viljoen, “The Matthean Characterisation of Jesus by God the Father” *HTS Theologese Studies / Theological Studies*, Volume 75 Number 3 (7 November 2019).

<sup>537</sup> For two introductory articles that introduce these topics in an approachable manner for all levels of readers, see: Gerald Bray, “God as Father: An Essay,” *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/god-as-father/>; Jon Bloom, “We Call Him ‘Father’ The Privilege of Christian Prayer” *Desiring God*, January 1, 2023, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-call-him-father>.

these instances, it is of the utmost theological significance that according to Jesus, “Father is the proper name for God and does not merely describe what he is like.”<sup>538</sup>

In Jesus’ teaching concerning good works for the Father’s glory, loving one’s enemies following the Father’s example, and the new covenant’s demand of perfection as the Father is perfect, each of these teachings from Christ is anchored in a theology of God as not only His Father but the Abba Father of all of His disciples. The same is true in chapters six and seven in Jesus’ teaching concerning the demand for forgiveness for disciples that the Father forgive them, trust in Abba’s provision, freedom from Gentile worries and anxiety in Abba’s love and knowledge, confidence in prayer based on the Father’s generosity and willingness to answer, and the necessity of doing the Father’s will.<sup>539</sup> It is here that a significant principle emerges that is true for all of the subsequent examples to be surveyed. The theological and hermeneutical key to understanding the life, ministry, and teaching of the Lord Jesus is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. If this is true, as this study posits that it is, the implications for interpreting and approaching Matthew’s Gospel and the entirety of the New Testament are significant.

#### *Further Teaching Concerning God as Father in Matthew’s Gospel (Chs. 10-28)*

Matthew 10 provides three more examples of Jesus’ teaching addressing God as Father as the theological ground for His instruction of His disciples (10:20, 29, .32, 33). Jesus’ instruction for His disciples and their persecution is rooted in the revelation that “the Spirit of your Father” will provide the necessary words to speak (10:20). Disciples are freed from fear in the knowledge that their Father is sovereign over all things. In judgment, the Lord Jesus will either

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<sup>538</sup> Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 59.

<sup>539</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 144.

accept or reject believers before His Father based upon their acceptance or rejection of Him.<sup>540</sup>

Matthew 11:27 contains what H. R. Mackintosh views as “the most important for Christology in the New Testament,” for it speaks of and reveals in an unparalleled way “the unqualified correlation of the Father and the Son.”<sup>541</sup> This text states explicitly what this study has inferred implicitly, the centrality of Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. As the only Son of God, the Lord Jesus does what only He can, reveals the Father to His disciples and all generations of Christians.<sup>542</sup> That is,

The Father is, he says, sovereign in revealing himself. However, Jesus immediately claims that he, the Son, has this sovereignty too. To know the Father is a gift given by the Son to whomever he chooses. As the Father reveals ‘these things’ concerning the Son to whomever he pleases, so the Son reveals the Father— and ‘all things’ the Father has committed to him— to whomever he pleases... Jesus as Son claims a relation of great

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<sup>540</sup> The significance between Jesus’ usage of “Father,” “Our father” “My father,” and “Your Father” throughout Matthew’s Gospel specifically and all of the Gospels generally is a significant topic of study that lies outside the scope of this research study.

For one example, see Carson’s discussion of the significance of this issue in reference to the Lord’s Prayer:

Throughout the prayer the reference is plural: “Our Father” (which in Aram. would have been *’abînû*, not *’abba* ). In other words, this is an example of a prayer to be prayed in fellowship with other disciples (cf. 18:19), not in isolation (cf. Jn 20:17). Striking is Jesus’ use of pronouns with “Father.” When forgiveness of sins is discussed, Jesus speaks of “your Father” (6:14– 15) and excludes himself. When he speaks of his unique sonship and authority, he speaks of “my Father” (e.g., 11:27) and excludes others. The “our Father” at the beginning of this model prayer is plural but does not include Jesus, since it is part of his instruction regarding what his disciples should pray.” Carson, *Matthew*, 243-244;

For another example from France, “The same language will recur more rarely in the rest of the gospel (10:20, 29; 13:43; 23:9) and instead from 7:21 onward Jesus will speak frequently of God as his own Father in a way which seems to exclude others from that special relationship (notably in 11:25–27, see comments there), and which correlates to the title “(my) Son” applied uniquely to Jesus from 2:15 and 3:17 on. When Jesus prays to God as “Father” (11:25, 26) it is sometimes explicitly as “my Father” (26:39, 42; Jesus speaks of God as “my Father” a further 14 times in Matthew) and never in the form “our Father” which he here teaches his disciples to use. Here are the raw materials for a theological system which posits a unique filial relationship for Jesus and a derivative relationship for God’s other “children” into which Jesus introduces them (cf. 11:27) but in which he does not share with them on the same level. While such a doctrine may be more fully developed from other parts of the NT, Matthew is content to allow it to emerge by implication from his usage. But it is primarily here, in the discourse on discipleship, that this privileged status of the disciples emerges, and in the family prayer which is at the heart of the discourse it is most appropriately expressed as their corporate address to God.” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 267-270.

<sup>541</sup> H.R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 27.

<sup>542</sup> For a fuller discussion of this theological topic and its significance, see Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 60-62.

personal intimacy with the Father, exclusive and unique, and marked by his full and willing obedience to the Father.<sup>543</sup>

The rest of Matthew's Gospel demonstrates the centrality of Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. In Matthew 13:43, the righteous will shine like the sun "in the kingdom of their Father." In Matthew 15:13, every plant not planted by "my Heavenly Father" will be rooted up. In Matthew 16:27, a central passage concerning the divinity and identity of Jesus as Israel's Messiah, it is neither flesh nor blood but "my Father who is in heaven" who reveals this truth to Peter.

In Matthew 18, there are three more examples (14, 19, 35) of Father language for God. First, it is not the will of the Father that any little ones should perish (18:14). Second, 18:19-20 is a significant text which ties three central themes of this dissertation together. That is, here Jesus places prayer in the familial context of the Fatherhood of God, prayer is offered by the disciples, not Jesus, directly to the Father, and this kind of prayer is marked by the boldness and confidence of sons and daughters who have the promise and assurance that their Abba will surely answer them. Jesus told them, "Again I say to you, 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" (Matthew 18:19-20). Believers are invited to address the Father just as Jesus did and they have the promise that their Father in heaven will accomplish whatever two or three gathered in prayer ask of Him. These themes will be discussed much more fully regarding other texts especially in John's Gospel concerning the prayers of Jesus and His instruction concerning this kind of prayer in the Farewell Discourse. For now, it is sufficient to note that Jesus' teaching here in Mathew affirms the major thesis of this study concerning the unprecedented nature of New Testament prayer based on the example and teaching of Jesus. The

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<sup>543</sup> Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 60.



third text in Matthew 18 which includes God as Father appears, after a parable that concludes this chapter, Jesus reveals the reality that the “Heavenly Father” will punish and inflict His wrath on any who do not forgive a brother from the heart (18:35).

Jesus responds to the request of James and John’s mother in Matthew 20:23 with the instruction that it is His Father who will prepare a place for each disciple. In an interesting and often perplexing passage, the Lord Jesus forbids His disciples from calling others or being called “Father” (Matthew 23:9).<sup>544</sup> Significantly, the Lord Jesus restricted this title for Christian leaders for it belonged to God alone, the Abba Father they all uniquely shared. As Jeremias so profoundly remarks, Jesus “Protected the new form of address to God by forbidding the disciples to use the address abba in everyday speech as a courtesy title (Matt. 23.9). They are to reserve it for God.”<sup>545</sup>

In another theologically significant and loaded text, Jesus notes that neither He nor the angels of heaven know the time of His return “but the Father only” (Matthew 24:36).<sup>546</sup> Once again, Jesus’ theology and teaching flow from the reality and revelation of God as Father. In Matthew 25:34, as the Lord Jesus reveals the weight and wonder of the coming judgment, again it is the Father who has prepared a kingdom from the foundation of the world. for those blessed because of their obedience. Finally, in Matthew 28:19 with the establishment of the central rite

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<sup>544</sup> Jeremias provides a lengthy and detailed treatment of this text in *The Prayers of Jesus*. While this text is outside the scope of this research project, it is significant for not only did Jesus demonstrate an unprecedented approach to God by calling Him His own abba and inviting His disciples to do the same, He protected the intimacy of this address by prohibiting them from using it for any human father, teacher, or leader on earth. Concerning this, Jeremias concludes, “Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.’ The prohibition against the disciples’ using the everyday, unexceptionable courtesy title ‘Abba’ loses its strangeness when we consider the unique way in which Jesus addressed God as ‘Abba’, a fact which is still to be discussed. This factor alone makes it possible to understand why Jesus protects the address ‘Abba’ from profanation. And that in turn means that in all probability the saying is authentic.” Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 41-43.

<sup>545</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 63.

<sup>546</sup> For a brief discussion of this against other texts that present Christ with more divine knowledge, see: Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 60.

of baptism and the churches' mission of evangelism, disciple-making, and teaching, it is the Trinitarian revelation of Father, Son, and Spirit appealed to there.

Fascinatingly, the only time recorded that Jesus did not directly address God as Father is found in His recitation of Psalm 22:1 where he cries out in Aramaic, “‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”(Matthew 27:46)<sup>547</sup> This is astounding for out of one hundred and seventy references to God as Father on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels, God is addressed by Him as Father unanimously. Jesus never addresses God as anything other than His Abba Father. The only exception to this is this quotation of Psalm 22 from the cross.<sup>548</sup> In every other instance, the Lord Jesus addresses God as Father in His prayers. Two points are noteworthy here. First, the fact that Jesus uses Aramaic, and not Hebrew for this quotation, affirms one of the primary theses of this study that behind Jesus' use of Father recorded in the Gospels is the original Aramaic. This quotation from Psalm 22 affirms among the other Aramaisms in the Gospels that Aramaic was the common language spoken by Jesus and thus Abba is the most likely word He used to address God as Father.<sup>549</sup> Second, the only time Jesus addressed God as something other than Father is when He quoted a prayer that was not His own. Jesus identifies with the suffering character of Psalm 22 and fulfills its Messianic prophecies. Thus, Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22 was both an expression of His anguish and a conscious fulfillment of the Messianic nature of Psalm 22 which began in anguish yet ends in

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<sup>547</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 63.

<sup>548</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “Ἀββᾶ,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Abridged Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1.

<sup>549</sup> For a discussion for whether this quotation was made in Aramaic or Hebrew, see: Murray J. Harris, *The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross: Their Circumstances and Meaning* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 60.

glory and vindication. Thus, Jesus' one instance of language for God other than Father is understood in the context of directly quoting Scripture to make clear His fulfillment of it.<sup>550</sup>

### *Conclusion to God as Father in the Gospel of Matthew*

Based upon this exegetical survey of every instance of Jesus' usage of Father in the Gospel of Matthew for God, there is a strong exegetical case to be made that Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father is not only central to Matthew's writing but is the theological heart of this entire Gospel. It is significant that Matthew's Gospel emphasizes more than either of the other Synoptics that, "God is the Father of Jesus and that God is the Father of those who follow Jesus. When held together, these twin convictions disclose Matthew's vision of the Fatherhood of God."<sup>551</sup> Matthew gives an invaluable gift to the overall presentation and understanding of the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the centrality of His teaching and relationship with and revelation of God as His and His disciples Abba Father. Mark laid a helpful foundation for this in His Gospel, but Mathew provides the most exhaustive development of this theme in the Synoptics. Matthew makes explicit what this dissertation has been investigating at length. Against the ANE, Old Testament, and Jewish background, Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as His and His disciples as Abba Father is novel, unprecedented, and is most clearly demonstrated in His revolutionary teaching and approach to prayer.

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<sup>550</sup> For further treatment of this significant saying of Jesus from the cross, see Harris, *The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross*. Other works which can be consulted as well in addition to the commentaries and works already quoted here are the following, Arthur W. Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005); Fleming Rutledge, *The Seven Last Words from the Cross* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>551</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 105. Thompson continues, noting that, "Matthew's frequent personal references to "your Father" or "your heavenly Father" highlight his emphasis on God as a Father who knows and provides for the needs of his children." Ibid., 106.

## God As Father in the Gospel of Luke

This exegetical analysis of Jesus' relationship and revelation of God as Abba Father especially in its relationship to a New Testament theology of prayer continues in Luke's Gospel. Luke's presentation of God as Father is in continuity with the other Synoptics while also adding significant nuance and further insight as to what it means to have God as Father according to Jesus. There are at least seventeen references to God as Father in Luke's Gospel. Of these seventeen, there are six which are unique to Luke.<sup>552</sup> Because the other eleven references to God as Father have already been addressed in Mark and Matthew's Gospels, this discussion of Luke's presentation of God as Father will be concentrated on these six instances which are unique to his Gospel. Specifically for the topic of this dissertation, Luke contributes much material which is insightful and revelatory of Jesus' profound development of and addition to the concept of prayer in the New Covenant.<sup>553</sup> These instances will also be explored for based upon Christ's teaching of God as believer's Abba Father, no other Gospel contributes more to a comprehensive presentation of New Testament prayer than Luke. Stein affirms that prayer is one of Luke's "Favorite themes" and thus his Gospel is essential for establishing a thorough understanding of this pivotal element of Christ's life and ministry.<sup>554</sup>

Luke's first reference to God as Father on the lips of Jesus comes early in Jesus' life when He was just a boy of twelve years in the temple. As the boy Jesus was in the temple both

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<sup>552</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 93. Concerning this, Thompson notes, "Of the seventeen references to God as Father in Luke, six passages are unique to Luke, and these show Jesus speaking about 'my Father' and 'your Father,' or simply addressing God as Father (2:49; 12:32; 22:29; 23:34, 46; 24:49)." Ibid., 93.

<sup>553</sup> Kyu Sam Han, "Theology of Prayer in the Gospel of Luke." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 4 (December 2000): 675–93.

<sup>554</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 339.

asking and answering questions,<sup>555</sup> upon being found by His troubled parents who had misplaced Him, He made the revealing and insightful statement concerning His identity, purpose, and unique relationship to God as His Father,<sup>556</sup> “And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?’” (Luke 2:49 ESV) The significant phrase for this study is that Jesus understood Himself as the son of God and Yahweh as His Father by referring to the necessity of His presence in the temple as “In my Father's house.” The Greek text for this phrase provides a translational challenge for it reads, “ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου.” This phrase reads literally “in the ... of my Father” with no corresponding noun for the definite article (τοῖς).<sup>557</sup> Nolland and others provide detailed treatments of this issue and affirm the translation of ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου as “In my Father's house.”<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> Nolland provides a helpful summation of the significance of Jesus' age for this pericope, writing, “At twelve years of age Jesus would in Jewish terms be beginning to make the transition into adult responsibility under the law (some rabbis considered this the age at which vows became binding, parental punishment could become more severe, and fasting could be expected to be sustained for a whole day [S ipre Num §22; b. B er. 24a; b. Yom. 82a]), but more often the onset of responsibilities is linked with the thirteenth birthday (e.g., m. N id . 5:6; m. 1A bot 5:21; Gen. R ab. 63:10), and in any case for a male childhood was deemed to continue for some years beyond the twelfth birthday (note in v 43 the use of παῖς, “boy”). Thus, at twelve Jesus is growing up, but not yet an adult.” John Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20: Volume 35A* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016), 198.

<sup>556</sup> Leon L. Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 110-111.

<sup>557</sup> David E. Garland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2011), 142.

<sup>558</sup> Nolland provides a thorough and detailed discussion of all of the various interpretive possibilities of this phrase based upon the pertinent historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, parallels, and possibilities. A brief snippet from his discussion provides sufficient for rendering this phrase as “In my Father's house:” “ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου (lit., “to be in the [pi.] of my Father”) is a much disputed phrase. Most obvious in the context (Jesus is in the temple and his parents did not know where he was) and well supported by linguistic parallels (Job 18:20; Esth 7:9; Josephus, *A n t.* 8.145; 16.302) offers many examples and detailed argumentation for this view) is the translation, “to be in the house of my Father [i.e., the temple].” Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, 200.

Robert Stein affirms Nolland's view and adds the following support to the discussion, “In my Father's house. Literally in the \_ of my Father. This can also refer to the ‘things/affairs’ or ‘people’ of my Father, but it is best understood as ‘house of my Father’ due to the parallels in 6:4 and 19:46, where the temple is referred to as God's house. (Cf. also John 2:16, where in the temple cleansing Jesus called the temple ‘my Father's house.’) The fact that Jesus was found in the temple (Luke 2:46) also supports this interpretation. Compare 10:22; 22:29; 24:49, where Jesus referred to God as ‘my Father.’” Robert A. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 116.

The significance of this usage against the Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish literature is astounding. As has been repeatedly argued by this study, there is nothing even remotely close to this in any of the Jewish literature. Before Jesus of Nazareth, no one understood themselves individually as a son of God or had the audacity to address Yahweh so directly and intimately as Jesus. As Morris insightfully remarks, “The expression my Father is noteworthy and no parallel appears to be cited (the Jews added ‘in heaven’ or used ‘our Father’ or the like). The first recorded words of the Messiah are then a recognition of his unique relationship to God and of the necessity (must) of his being in the Father’s house.”<sup>559</sup> Morris’ point is accentuated all the more when it is taken into account that Jesus not only employed an unprecedented approach to God as His personal Father but did so in the intimate and familial manner of a child most certainly addressing His parents here in the Aramaic and thus calling Yahweh His Abba. As Marshall highlights, “Jesus’ first recorded words, uttered at a significant period in his life, set the tone for what follows in the Gospel.”<sup>560</sup> This only further accentuates and legitimizes the claims of this study and highlights the theological significance and implications for accurately understanding Jesus’ self-understanding of His identity as Yahweh’s Son and His subsequent instruction that all of His disciples are to follow His example and address God in the same manner.

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Finally, I. Howard Marshall also provides a detailed treatment of this topic and affirms this traditional translation, “The first translation is perfectly possible linguistically and was accepted by the early church fathers; it is also required by the context, since the point at issue is where Jesus is to be found. The temple is thus the ‘house of God’ (Jn. 2:16), and it is here that Jesus feels that he ought to be (cf. Heb. 3:6). This is why he absents himself from his earthly father’s house, a contrast emphasised by the juxtaposition of vs. 48 and 49. The same point emerges later in the accounts of Jesus’ relation to his parents (Mk. 3:31–35; Lk. 11:27f.; Jn. 2:4; cf. 7:3–10) and of the attitude he required from his disciples (9:59–62; 14:26; Mk. 10:29). I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 129.

<sup>559</sup> Morris, Luke, 110-111.

<sup>560</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 128.

A truly astonishing point emerges here which has profound theological implications for approaching the Gospels and Jesus' teaching concerning Yahweh as Abba Father. Based upon all of the historical and literary evidence presented thus far in this study, the first person ever recorded as undeniably understanding themselves as a son of Yahweh, claiming this identity, addressing God as such, and doing so most certainly not in religious formalism but in the intimacy and familial dialect of the Aramaic Abba was not only Jesus of Nazareth but the boy Jesus at twelve years old. The significance of this claim cannot be overstated. The boy Jesus of Nazareth claims to have the most intimate and direct relationship with Yahweh in a manner that not even the kings of Israel dared to claim even though they could have done so based upon Yahweh's election of them as His sons through the Davidic kingship (2 Samuel 7:14).<sup>561</sup> No Jew had ever dared nor presumed to do what Jesus of Nazareth did at twelve years old. The very first words ever recorded from Christ's life, even before officially beginning His ministry, represent a radical and unprecedented relationship with and revelation of Yahweh as Abba. The boy Jesus makes the most exceptional and unparalleled claims to His relationship with Yahweh which would be one of the distinctive marks not only of His life and ministry but of the New Covenant which He claimed to inaugurate. This text is central to understanding the theological center of Jesus' life and ministry for, as Edwards addresses, "The first (2:49) and last (24:49) words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke refer to God as his Father. Jesus' intimate and filial relation to God as Father is the center and sum of his life and ministry."<sup>562</sup>

What does this text add to understanding Jesus' approach to God as Father against the Jewish background? This text represents the first and foundational attestation that Jesus

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<sup>561</sup> These key texts were explored in the chapter dealing with Old Testament references to God as Father.

<sup>562</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 3.

undeniably understood Himself to be the very Son of God and to enjoy the intimacy and access to God as His Abba that this study has affirmed. There is a plethora of verification among the scholarly literature that affirm the centrality of God as Father in Luke's Gospel. For example, Green writes concerning this text that "Jesus' words, then, are pivotal, and contain within them both an affirmation of his particular relation to God and his commitment to God's purpose."<sup>563</sup> Thus, the foundational tenet of this study that Jesus' use of Abba as a direct address for Yahweh in a manner unprecedented and unparalleled in the Old Testament and Jewish literature is not only affirmed here but is highlighted when it is taken to account that the boy Jesus of twelve years old is the first recorded to ever address Yahweh with such confidence and intimacy. Luke 2:49 highlights Jesus' unique role as Yahweh's son in a manner that will be developed and expounded upon further within the Gospel.<sup>564</sup>

The second unique reference to God as Father in Luke's Gospel comes within a Lukan pericope that finds its parallel in Matthew's recounting of the Lord's prayer. Whereas the first usage of Father language for God emphasized Christ's unique claim to Yahweh as His personal Father, here, this relationship is opened up to include His disciples as having access to God as their Abba and to share an unprecedented familial intimacy with Him just as Jesus does. The text reads, "For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'" (Luke 12:30-32 ESV) The first reference to God knowing the needs of His disciples before they even ask Him as a loving

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<sup>563</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 196.

<sup>564</sup> Bock explores the theme of Jesus as the Son of God and other titles in Luke-Acts in the following work: Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God's Promised Program, Realized for All Nations* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2012), 188-189.



Father was addressed in the previous section. Here, disciples are encouraged to pursue the kingdom knowing that God, their Father, delights to give them the kingdom.

Jesus' address to His disciples as “little flock” (τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον,) is an “unusual form of address” for it is found “only here in the New Testament.”<sup>565</sup> There are several significant things taking place here. First, this rare address of His disciples as “little flock” has its foundation in Old Testament imagery as Nolland notes, “‘Do not fear’ reflects the vulnerability of the flock in its littleness (cf. Amos 7:2, 5). ‘Flock’ is a stock image for Israel/Judah (Jer 13:17; Ezek 34; Zech 10:3; etc.). ‘To give you the kingdom’ probably alludes to Dan 7:14, 27 (cf. vv 17, 22).”<sup>566</sup> Thus, Jesus' employment of flock language recalls the Old Testament imagery of Israel as Yahweh's flock. Here, however, it is not Israel but His disciples and those who follow Him who are part of His τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον. Second, the Father's tender, careful, and intimate care of Jesus' disciples is emphasized in this text for they are not only His vulnerable flock, they are His very children. Once again, there is no historical, religious, or linguistic parallel to Jesus' teaching to His disciples that Yahweh is their Abba Father and they are to trust in His tender care as such. The foundation, then, for understanding Jesus' New Covenant approach to God is within the context of family and Yahweh's role as the believer's Abba Father.

Finally, it is of the utmost importance here that Jesus expands His relationship with God as His Abba as one His disciples are to share in as well.<sup>567</sup> Once again, if Jesus only claimed a

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<sup>565</sup> Morris, *Luke*, 254.

<sup>566</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34, Volume 35B* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016), 301. Concerning the further cultural and historical significance of this text, Nolland continues, “Taken alone, the text announces the coming of salvation, rather than the judgment of God, or (its expression in [ongoing]) oppression by the Gentiles. It is, however, regularly (and probably correctly) assumed that this language is spoken not to a general audience but to those who have responded to the ministry of Jesus and in connection with whom the prophetic promises alluded to are to come to their fulfillment.” Ibid.

<sup>567</sup> For a study that explores the relationship between Jesus and God as Father and the invitation for His disciples to address God as their Abba Father, see: Paul Kenneth Moser, “Jesus and Abba in Gethsemane: A Center in Filial Cooperation.” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 15, no. 1 (2021): 63–78.

personal and intimate relationship with Yahweh as His son, there would be nothing in the biblical text to suggest that disciples had the same privilege. Rather, it would be seen as presumptuous and potentially blasphemous for Jesus' disciples to infringe on His identity as Israel's Messiah and the unique son of God by seeking to approach God in the same manner He did. However, this text is only one among many that make explicitly clear that Jesus invited His disciples to share in the intimacy with and access to God as Abba Father that He enjoyed and modeled for them.<sup>568</sup>

*The Lord's Prayer, A Friend at Midnight, A Persistent Widow, And Didactic Instruction on Bold, Persistent Prayer*

This point is stressed further when the larger context of these words is taken into account. As has been repeatedly argued, Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father is inextricably tied to His example and teaching concerning prayer in the New Covenant. The most significant developments and contributions to understanding God as Abba Father and disciples' relationship to Him as such come primarily from the context of prayer in the life and teaching of Jesus. This has been demonstrated in Mark and Matthew's Gospels and is perhaps even more evident here concerning Luke's correlation between Jesus and His disciples' relationship with God as Father and the implications of this new relationship most prominently shown through prayer.<sup>569</sup>

Luke 11 contains Luke's presentation of the Lord's prayer. This text has already been addressed with its parallel in Matthew. However, it is significant to note that Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer provides an even more explicit attestation and affirmation to the claim of this

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<sup>568</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 86.

<sup>569</sup> Once again, see Han, *Theology of Prayer in the Gospel of Luke*, for a further discussion of this topic and more in-depth defense of these claims.

study that Jesus not only taught His disciples to address God as Father generally (Luke 11:2) but to address Him as their Abba Father.<sup>570</sup> Of significance for this study is that Luke immediately transitions from the Lord's Prayer into a unique parable that only He records in any of the Gospels. This parable is bookended with the Lord's Prayer on one side with a direct address of God as Abba Father and clear instruction on how to pray (content), and another didactic section instructing disciples how they are to pray (form) on the other.<sup>571</sup> Thus this section is insightful in developing a more robust understanding of the relationship between God's identity as Abba Father and the believer's intimacy and access to Him in the New Covenant most distinctly illustrated through prayer.

In this parable, Jesus teaches the power of "impudence" and "persistence" in prayer as well as the encouragement to pray based upon God the Father's gracious, kind, and generous character.<sup>572</sup> The immediate context is clearly meant to be instructive for prayer. The chapter

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<sup>570</sup> This point was addressed at length in the previous chapter and in this chapter when discussing the Lord's prayer in Matthew. Once again, there is large support for the view that Luke's use of the vocative form *πάτερ* in His account of the Lord's prayer as well as Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane record Jesus's original use of the Aramaic word, Abba: Kittel, *Ἀββᾶ*, 1:6; Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 11-57, Idem., *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*, 63-75; Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba*, 494; Verbrugge, *Ἀββᾶ*, 1; Schelbert, *Abba Vater*; Cobb, *Jesus' Abba*; Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2; Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology*, 379.

<sup>571</sup> Affirming the authenticity of the foundational claim of this study that Jesus employed the Aramaic term Abba not only in His own prayer but also in the model prayer for His disciples, Marshall writes, "Luke's prayer begins with the address *Πάτερ*. This is the simple form used by Jesus in his own prayers and there is fairly general agreement that it represents Aramaic *'abbâ*. If so, we have here the basis for the form of address used in prayer in the early church (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Jewish prayers referred to God as Father, but the simple form is not attested in Palestinian usage in which God is addressed as 'our' or 'my' Father." I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 456. Bock supports this claim as well, writing, "The address of God as Father is important, since it focuses on the relationship God has with his children. The expression goes back to the Aramaic abba, which combines respect for the father's authority with a sense of intimacy." Bock, *Luke*, Lk 11:1-13.

<sup>572</sup> The fact that this parable carries this dual interpretation is clear from the context where it is placed. Concerning this, Stein writes, "This has been interpreted as teaching the contrast between the householder's unwillingness to assist his neighbor and God's great desire to assist his children. Others have interpreted the parable as teaching that persistence in prayer will be rewarded. Both emphases are found elsewhere in the Gospel. The former is clearly taught in 11:13 and the latter in the parable of the unjust judge (18:1-8). There is no need, however, to choose between these interpretations. Both meanings are contained in the parable and in the concluding sayings in 11:9-13, which are connected to 11:5-8 by the words "ask" and "give." Stein, *Luke*, 339.

opens with the Lord Jesus Himself praying when His disciples ask Him to “teach them to pray” (11:1).<sup>573</sup> What follows first is instruction as to the content of their prayers. Christ instructs them with what is now famously referred to as the Lord’s prayer. This clear didactic teaching is meant to guide the content of their prayers. Then, after detailing the content of what His disciples are to pray for, He provides them with a parable that instructs them in the manner they are to pray. Thus, the Lord Jesus provides both the content and manner for the prayer lives of His disciples.<sup>574</sup>

The parable is set within the honor and shame context of the Eastern world of the New Testament.<sup>575</sup> When the friend is in desperate need of bread for hospitality at an inopportune hour, he goes to his neighbor's house at midnight. The man who is in need knows that his neighbor will be likely to respond to His bold request based on the cultural norms of the time. The cultural elements of the text that may be easily missed by modern readers are undeniable for Christ’s original audience.<sup>576</sup> Though the man’s neighbor is in bed and his children are asleep,

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<sup>573</sup>The arrangement of the text is undeniably insightful for the interpretation for all three distinct elements of Jesus’ teaching concerning prayer. Garland affirms this, noting that, “Luke has joined together three pericopes and an exhortation to create a unit on prayer. This teaching on prayer is set up by a disciple observing Jesus at prayer and asking him to teach them to pray as John had taught his disciples. It is not directly related to what precedes or follows except for its theme. Jesus’ life is undergirded by prayer throughout the narrative, and his devotion to prayer becomes a model for disciples to imitate.” Garland, *Luke*, 470.

<sup>574</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 462.

<sup>575</sup> Garland highlights the cultural discontinuity between this parable and modern Western cultures. Whereas Western culture would feel embarrassed to disturb a neighbor with such a request at a late hour, this was not so in the Eastern culture in which Jesus lived and ministered. Rather, “In a close relationship, a request is not prefaced with “please,” but “give me” is quite correct. The host asks with confidence because (1) he is not asking for himself but to honor a friend; (2) he is asking a friend, not just any neighbor; (3) he is asking for the bare minimum required for a simple meal; and (4) his guest is not simply his private guest but, from the perspective of the Oriental, a guest of the entire community. One greeted a visitor: “You have honored our village....” From the host’s perspective the sleeping neighbor was duty bound to help him fulfill his duty to this guest of the village.” Garland, *Luke*, 479-480. For more information on the background of this parable, see, Morris, *Luke*, 230.

<sup>576</sup> Bock provides an introductory discussion as to the cultural historical background of the parable. He writes, “In the ancient world, food was not as readily available as it is in modern culture. Most food was prepared daily; preservatives were largely unknown. In addition, ancient culture put a high premium on hospitality. Guests had the right to a good host who would provide for their needs. So the man who receives a late-night guest faces a dilemma: he has a guest but no food. He must make a choice: either to be rude by not welcoming this guest with

Jesus says he will not get up because of their friendship but because of his friend's "impudence" or "persistence" (ἀναίδεια). The meaning of the parable rests on the definition of this word ἀναίδεια.

Αναίδεια is a hapax legomenon and is, therefore, more difficult to translate and fully understand. Louw and Nida define it as, "A lack of sensitivity to what is proper—'insolence, audacity, impudence, shamelessness.'<sup>577</sup> BDAG captures this same nuance: "Lack of sensitivity to what is proper, carelessness about the good opinion of others, *shamelessness, impertinence, impudence, ignoring of convention.*"<sup>578</sup> There is a general consensus to this meaning of "impudence" and "shamelessness" among lexicons and theological dictionaries, especially in the context of Luke 11. Jesus has just taught the Lord's prayer and prepares for an exhortation toward bold and persistent prayer (Lk. 11:9-13). This parable is meant to illustrate these truths in a manner His audience would be able to understand and implement in their prayer lives.<sup>579</sup>

Christ makes clear that this is a "lesser to greater" story.<sup>580</sup> If this friend responds because of the shameless impudence of his neighbor, "How much more will the heavenly Father give the

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food or to seek food from a neighbor, who may be able to help but may be in bed. One final cultural note is key. Most ancient Palestinian homes had only one room. Waking the father would mean risking waking the family." Bock, *Luke*, Lk 11:1–13.

<sup>577</sup> Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 627.

<sup>578</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 63.

<sup>579</sup> Garland helpfully addressed the first-century shame and honor culture which serves as the background of this parable, writing, The anticipated response occurs in v. 7 and awkwardly includes the unthinkable response of a selfish neighbor. It should be noted that the parable does not begin, 'Who of you will be so impudent as to disturb your neighbor in the middle of the night with such a request?' but, 'Who of you will have a friend who gives this response?' Jesus' listeners are intended to identify with the petitioner, and the question conveys, 'Can you imagine going to a neighbor with this request and getting this kind of response?' The obvious answer is 'Certainly not!' since anyone from this culture would sense deeply the responsibility to a guest and would also possess a highly developed sense of shame and honor." Garland, *Luke*, 479.

<sup>580</sup> Charles Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York Crossroad, 1992) 131-132. Garland also affirms this interpretive approach to the parables, stating that, "The

Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). As the Lord’s prayer and the subsequent section on prayer illustrate directly, the context is prayer addressed to God as Father.<sup>581</sup> It is impossible to wrench this parable from its literary context and the undeniable correlation it has to a shamelessly bold confidence in addressing God as one’s Father in prayer. The employment of *Ἀναίδεια* in this parable then, highlights what appears to be “impudence” or “shamelessness” unless the depth of relationship goes beyond a mere friend. Rather, the meaning is dependent on the prior and following contexts that prayer is not like trying to convince a reluctant friend to answer one’s request. Rather, prayer is addressed to the believer’s Abba who is gracious, generous, kind, eager, and willing to answer their petitions. Thus, believers can approach Him with a shamelessly bold confidence as sons and daughters approaching their Abba Father.

Jesus clarifies this meaning even further in His admonition to His followers to “Ask, seek, and knock” (Lk 11:9-12). This is in the context of the Lord’s prayer where Matthew records the very same exhortation (Matt 7:7-11). The meaning is exceedingly clear in both contexts;<sup>582</sup> Christians are invited to make their requests of God in shameless and impudent faith knowing that He will respond because He is their Abba Father who loves them and cares for their needs.<sup>583</sup> Green provides helpful insight into the meaning of this parable in its literary context, noting that Jesus is not merely interested in the mechanics of prayer but,

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model prayer is supplemented by two hyperbolic illustrations (11:5– 8, 11– 13) that argue from the lesser to the greater and surround an exhortation to pray (11:9– 10).” Garland, *Luke*, 472.

<sup>581</sup> Marshall notes concerning the various interpretive positions that the Fatherhood of God is central to interpreting this parable, “The fact is that any encouragement to go on praying must necessarily be based on an assurance that God answers prayer. The point of the parable is clearly not: Go on praying because God will eventually respond to importunity; rather it is: Go on praying because God responds graciously to the needs of his children. This point is confirmed by 11:9–13 where the point stressed is the certainty of God’s answer to prayer and the assurance that he will give good gifts to those who ask him.” Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 462.

<sup>582</sup> Crump, *Knocking on Heavens Door*, 72-74.

<sup>583</sup> The view being presented here is that the Fatherhood of God is essential for interpreting this entire section and serves as the theological and exegetical key not only here, but to all of Christ’s instruction on prayer.

Much more pivotal is the way in which Jesus continues in vv 5-13 what he had begun in vv 2-4 - namely, the identification of God as the Father whose graciousness is realized in his provision of what is needed, and indeed far beyond what might be expected, to those who join him in relationship. Because the disciples have to do with such a God, they are liberated to ask, to search, and to knock (vv 9– 10), knowing that God will not answer their prayers with harmful gifts but with good (vv 11– 13).<sup>584</sup>

Christ sees prayer as actively engaging with God and obtaining the petition one has made of Him not based on mere formalism or ritualistic performance of religious acts. Rather, New Testament prayer is marked by an unprecedented and unparalleled access and intimacy to God as Father.<sup>585</sup>

How can this be explained? What is the transformation that has taken place to account for the radical development and transformation in the New Testament? It is Jesus of Nazareth's relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. The teaching here and the invitation for disciples to address God as Abba Father represent an "Authoritative statement on the part of Jesus which rests on His own personal relationship to God as the Father."<sup>586</sup> Jesus'

transformative and unprecedented teaching concerning God as Father is the principal foundation for the centrality of God as Father in the New Testament. For, as Green notes,

The disciples' capacity to recognize and address God in prayer as 'Father' is rooted, most immediately, in revelation, for Jesus had recently asserted that knowledge of the Father was unavailable apart from the Son's disclosure of the same (10:22). That he chooses to

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Green affirms this view by labeling this entire section "The Fatherhood of God." He writes, "The Lukan account of Jesus' interaction with Martha and Mary, then, prepares for Jesus' teaching on the fatherhood of God by focusing on one's disposition toward authentic hearing in the presence of the inbreaking kingdom. (2) Earlier, in a scene characterized as this one is by the relative seclusion of Jesus with his disciples, Jesus referred to God as his Father five times, both in prayer and instruction (10:21– 22). In that co-text, he spoke of himself as the Son who was uniquely able to reveal the Father to those whom he chose. This is precisely what he does in the current scene. Note how the beginning and end of this section refer to God as the Father of the disciples (vv 2, 13— in contrast to human fathers, v 11), with the section as a whole fashioned to show Jesus teaching his followers about God's generosity and faithfulness. Because of God's faithfulness, Jesus insists, life apart from the anxiety and agitation experienced by Martha (10:38– 42) is possible; in the face of the goodness of the Father, disciples may respond with trust and fidelity." Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 386.

<sup>584</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 391.

<sup>585</sup> Bock too affirms this interpretive approach writing, "Here the stress is on prayer and the attitude we bring to the Father in prayer." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Lk 11:1–13.

<sup>586</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 468.

unveil who the Father is to these disciples signals their having been chosen to receive this insight. In this way, Jesus invites these disciples, who have already begun to look to God in trust and obedience, to regard God as Father and themselves as God's children.<sup>587</sup>

As will be fleshed out in the next chapter, New Testament prayer is categorically different from its Old Testament counterpart. The clearest explanation for this is the shift in believer's relationship to God not merely as corporate or covenant Father but in their ability to approach Him as individual sons and daughters just as Jesus modeled and taught them to do,

Implicit in Christ's teaching is the foundation for the development and transformation of petitionary prayer in the New Testament based upon the goodness, grace, and generosity of God as Father. Brümmer writes concerning the implications of Jesus' presentation of petitionary prayer in the Christian life, Requests do not only have an expressive but also a prescriptive force: in requesting I ask someone to do something. In this sense request(s) are aimed at *persuading* the addressee and not merely at expressing the attitude of the petitioner. This also applies to petitionary prayer, if taken at its face value as a request addressed to God.<sup>588</sup>

The entirety of Christ's instruction makes clear that Christian prayer has a real and tangible influence and impact on God. The key to understanding the impact of New Testament prayers upon God and its efficacy is Christ's instruction that prayer is more than lifeless religious formalism. Rather, it is the living and dynamic relationship of an Abba Father with His beloved sons and daughters.<sup>589</sup> If even sinful humans will respond to bold, audacious, and impudent requests, how much more will a gracious and kind Heavenly Father respond to the needs and

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<sup>587</sup> Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 389.

<sup>588</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray? On Prayer and the Nature of Faith* (London: SCM, 1984), 29.

<sup>589</sup> Garland affirms this claim and highlights its significance against the pagan background in which Jesus lived, writing, "Jesus addresses God as Father in his prayer in 10:21 and has said that no one knows who the Father is except the Son and whomever he has chosen to reveal him. He teaches his disciples to pray to the Father as a father." Garland, *Luke*, 475.



requests of His children? Implicit in Luke 11 is what Christ makes explicit in Luke 18. The purpose of this parable situated between the Lord's prayer and the clear call to approach Abba for whatever is needed knowing that as a good Father, He will surely answer and provide is to encourage and charge Christians to pray with bold, audacious, and impudent faith based not upon their own merit or good deeds but their relationship with God as Abba and their identity as His sons and daughters. This parable functions as a catalyst to faith knowing that the Lord will surely hear and respond to the prayers of His saints because He loves and cares for them as their Abba Father.<sup>590</sup>

This Lukan text introduces a major facet of this dissertation's thesis which will be further supported in this chapter and the next one. That is, Jesus' revelation of and relationship with God as Abba Father resulted in categorical and seismic development and transformation of New Testament prayer. Prayer in the two Testaments is markedly different and the explanation can be traced to one man; Jesus of Nazareth. As has been surveyed at length and will continue to be demonstrated, there is no evidence that anyone ever approached Yahweh in the Old Testament or any period of Jewish history with the intimacy or audacity of Jesus. What Christ taught His disciples to do here in Luke 11 He repeatedly demonstrated throughout His life and ministry. Fascinatingly, it was Christ's prayer life that captivated his disciples and caught their attention.<sup>591</sup> They never asked Him to instruct them to preach as He did, or do miracles, or any other element of His life or ministry. It was His prayer life and the intimacy and access that He

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<sup>590</sup> Green contains an insightful section addressing this concept in the context of Luke 11 from the first-century Graco-Roman culture where natural fathers were harsh, cruel, and authoritarian. Thus, it was not enough for Jesus to merely reveal God's true identity as Father. Rather, he had to also instruct as to what kind of Father God is in contrast to the cognitive environment of the day. In Green's words, he concludes, "The question was (and is) no less pressing, In what sense is God thus to be understood? Hence, God is presented by Luke as the Father who cares for his children and acts redemptively on their behalf." Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 387.

<sup>591</sup> Morris, *Luke*, 228.

shared with Yahweh that compelled them to ask Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).<sup>592</sup> This point is notable. It was the prayer life of Jesus of Nazareth that captivated His disciples more than any other element of His life or ministry.<sup>593</sup> Not only did Jesus demonstrate a markedly distinct approach to prayer when compared to the Old Testament, He clarified His own approach through the didactic instruction of His disciples.<sup>594</sup> Jesus’ example in prayer and His teaching coupled together illustrate undeniably that something in the New Covenant has radically transformed the relationship between believers and their God and their approach to Him through prayer. The thesis this study has sought to prove is that the unprecedented and unparalleled approach to Yahweh modeled in the life and teaching of Jesus which would indelibly impact all of His disciples and the New Testament was His personal relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. The Lord’s prayer, the parable of the friend at midnight, and Christ’s instruction on prayer all in the context of God as Abba ties these themes together and affirm the major premises of this dissertation.

*A Brief Excursus: The Parable of the Persistent Widow and Christ’s Novel Approach to Prayer*

The thesis of this study is that Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father is the hermeneutical key to His unprecedented and unparalleled approach to God as Father most clearly illustrated through the example of His own prayer life and His instruction to His disciples concerning prayer. As this study has developed, it has been demonstrated that Jesus’

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<sup>592</sup> Green supports these claims, writing, “The portrayal of Jesus as a person of prayer, imprinted indelibly in the minds of Luke’s audience, has not gone unnoticed by the disciples. In this instance, his own pattern of prayer catalyzes their request for instruction in prayer.” Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 388.

<sup>593</sup> Garland, *Luke*, 473-474.

<sup>594</sup> According to Bock, “The disciples’ request also reflects the independent identity they were developing as they followed Jesus. The more they followed Jesus the more they realized that he was forming a new community, a distinct expression of Jewish hope. So they wanted to know how to pray to mark their distinctiveness. This is the only time in Jesus’ ministry that there is a request for instruction on prayer.” Bock, *Luke*, Lk 11:1–13.

approach to Yahweh as Abba Father has implications far beyond prayer in the New Testament. The heart of the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus and one of the distinctive marks which makes the new covenant definitively new is Christ's revelation and believer's invitation to experience historic intimacy and scandalous access to God as their Abba Father. Thus, it is not only prayer but significant amounts of Christ's teaching which find their foundation and theological precedent in God as Abba Father and Christian's role as His sons and daughters.

Christian prayer is decisively distinct from its ancient Jewish counterpart.<sup>595</sup> This has been investigated in part in the previous discussion of Jesus' teaching in Luke 11. The distinguishing aspect of Christian prayer which makes it novel and represents a significant development from the Old Testament is that it is addressed to God as Abba Father.<sup>596</sup> Prayer has been transformed in the New Covenant by the example and teaching of Jesus to be marked with an unprecedented intimacy and access to Yahweh as Abba Father. Just as there is no parallel to Christ's theology of God as Abba Father in the Old Testament, there is no equivalent to the intimate and accessible nature of New Testament prayer. Jesus of Nazareth completely revolutionized the practice of prayer by placing it within the context of familial intimacy and opening up astounding access to His Father. The three examples addressed in Luke 11 and Luke's parable unique to His Gospel lay a biblical-theological foundation for these claims. Although not in the direct context of God as Father, Luke 18 is another Lukan parable that illustrates the decisively new nature of Christian prayer.<sup>597</sup>

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<sup>595</sup> This statement will be defended in the next chapter.

<sup>596</sup> This point has been defended at length throughout this study. For support of this claim from the Lukan text, see. Stein, *Luke*, 340.

<sup>597</sup> Concerning the significance of prayer in the Lukan material when compared to the other Gospels, Stein writes, "Whereas the terms 'prayer' and 'pray' are found thirteen times in Mark and seventeen times in Matthew, they are found twenty-one times in Luke and twenty-five times in Acts. More significant, however, than the frequency of this concept in Luke-Acts is that it occurs at key times and places. The Gospel begins with prayer in

Luke 18 is noted by some scholars as the most significant passage relating to Christ's theology of prayer.<sup>598</sup> So much of what has already been established applies to this text as well. It is one of the only parables that is introduced with its explanation,<sup>599</sup> "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Whereas the parable of the friend at midnight showed prayer is persistent and shameless, here Jesus teaches that prayer must be patient in its persistence.<sup>600</sup> What transpires is an account of a widow who needs justice from an "unjust judge." Though he has no respect for God or this woman, because of her persistence, he will ultimately give her justice.<sup>601</sup> The woman kept coming and asking the judge, "Give me justice against my adversary" (Luke 18:3). The text notes that "For a while" the judge refused yet after a while, he said to Himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming'" (Luke 18:4-5).<sup>602</sup>

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the temple (1:9-10). After its brief summary of the Gospel's contents, Acts begins with the disciples' praying (1:14) and maintains this emphasis. Luke alone recorded that Jesus was praying at his baptism when he was anointed by the Spirit (see comments on 3:21) and that Jesus chose the Twelve after he had prayed all night (Luke 6:12). Only Luke recorded that Jesus prayed before he asked his disciples, "Who do the crowds say I am?" (9:18). Again only Luke mentioned that at his transfiguration Jesus went up on the mountain to pray and that while he was praying he was transfigured (9:28-29). In the context of his own praying, Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer (11:1-4). Through prayer believers are able to persist and not lose heart (18:1) and to keep from falling into temptation (22:40,46). And because of Jesus' prayer, Peter's denial did not turn into apostasy (22:32). Clearly for Luke prayer was seen as a vital and necessary part of the Christian life both individually and corporately." Stein, *Luke*, 43-44.

<sup>598</sup> W. Ott, *Gebet und Heil Die Bedeutung der Gebetsparanese in der lukanischen Theologie* (München Kosel, 1965), 128.

<sup>599</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove; InterVarsity, 1990) 271.

<sup>600</sup> Crump, *Knocking on Heavens Door*, 77-89.

<sup>601</sup> Garland, *Luke*, 730.

<sup>602</sup> There is a challenge presented in understanding how to accurately render the verb translated "wear out" (ὀπιπάζειν). Garland notes that this term, "Was used as a boxing term for a blow that results in the bruising below the eye. Paul uses it when he refers to pummeling his body that he might subdue it (1 Cor 9:27). If this is meant literally, the judge decides to vindicate her lest finally she comes and gives him a pounding that will result in a black eye. 10 He may be afraid of a slap in the face, which is the archetypal insult (Matt 5:39; Isa. 50:6; m. B. Qam. 6:8)." However, as Garland also notes, "The verb can also mean to "wear down, wear out." This is most likely its meaning

Again, what is contained in this text are more allusions to the same audacious and bold kind of prayer from Luke 11.<sup>603</sup> However, here in Luke 18, there is a major development. Not only does the Lord Jesus instruct that prayer ought to appear shameless and even impudent at times, but perhaps more controversially, prayer is meant to be offered persistently yet also patiently over time.<sup>604</sup> This is a patient confident, and hopeful kind of persistent patience that is meant to mark Christian prayer.<sup>605</sup> From the start, Jesus seeks to reveal the nature of prayer to His disciples so that they might not become discouraged in it.<sup>606</sup> It must be noted that it is not vain repetition or the sheer number of prayers offered that gets God's attention. Jesus teaches against this idea as a gentile view of prayer in Matthew 6:7-8. Disciples are encouraged that the "Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:8). Instead, He is encouraging disciples to devote themselves to persistent and patient prayer in hope and to not lose heart. While this parable does not directly place prayer in the context of God as Father, there is such a strong Lukan foundation for prayer addressed to God as such that it is certainly not inappropriate to include it in this discussion. This distinctively new and unparalleled approach to God in Christian prayer is confirmed by Jesus' previous transformational teaching that prayer is to be addressed to God as Abba Father.

Just as in Luke 11, this parable employs another "how much more" story reasoning from the lesser to the greater.<sup>607</sup> Jesus has already interpreted the parable from the beginning, it is an

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here. In a test of wills, the widow's pestering gets the judge to give up." Garland, *Luke*, 735. Stein also presents a discussion of the proper rendering of this term, Stein, *Luke*, 462.

<sup>603</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 88.

<sup>604</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 460.

<sup>605</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34, Volume 35B*, 474.

<sup>606</sup> Bock, *Luke, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, Lk 18:1-8.

<sup>607</sup> Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 131-132.

exhortation to pray and not lose heart.<sup>608</sup> He clarifies this further in verses 7-8: “And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” What is crucially important here is that Christ is introducing the idea of patient and prolonged prayer while waiting upon God for an answer.<sup>609</sup> His disciples are to “always pray.” This includes a kind of petitioning that lifts up their needs and requests before God “Day and night.” The Lord Jesus knew that His people would easily become discouraged by the delay in answers.<sup>610</sup> However, this is the nature of prayer in the kingdom and so this teaching functions to bolster hope in the Christian to remain expectant and confident that even when it seems that the Lord is slow in answering the petitions of His people, He will not delay long over His people. Surely He will answer them.<sup>611</sup>

This distinctive kind of Christian prayer is defined as “persistent” or “intercessory prayer.”<sup>612</sup> As will be shown in the next chapter, what was the rare practice of a few individuals in the Old Testament becomes the normative practice of all New Testament believers. The gracious, generous, and kind nature of Jesus’ Abba is upheld by this instruction encouraging disciples that even when prayers appear to be unanswered, continue in steadfast and faithful

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<sup>608</sup> Matteo Crimella, “God Is Not Like That Judge (Lk 18:1-8).” *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 9, no. 1 (2017): 88–103.

<sup>609</sup> Dongsoo Kim, “Lukan Pentecostal Theology of Prayer: Is Persistent Prayer Not Biblical?” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 2 (July 2004): 215.

<sup>610</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34, Volume 35B*, 474.

<sup>611</sup> Marshall supports this perspective noting that, “Jewish teaching in general rejected the idea of perpetual prayer, although there were exceptions (SB II, 237f.; I. 1036). But the thought here is of continual prayer, rather than continuous prayer. The fear is that men will give up before they are answered.” Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 671.

<sup>612</sup> Colin Finnie Miller, “Intercessory Prayer: History, Method, Subjects and Theology.” *Studia Liturgica* 3, no. 1 (Sum 1964): 20–29; Dutch Sheets, *Intercessory Prayer: How God Can Use Your Prayers to Move Heaven and Earth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016); Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of St Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

persistence in prayer knowing that God who is not just Abba Father but who is a just judge will certainly provide justice for His elect.<sup>613</sup> Han writes concerning this kind of prayer that, “While the parable recognizes that there must be a time interval, it affirms, nevertheless, that God will respond quickly to requests, and faithfulness in prayer is required for disciples who are looking for the kingdom of God.”<sup>614</sup> What is undeniable is that Christ expected His disciples to engage in audaciously shameless prayer (Lk. 11) which is also marked by patience and persistence (Lk. 18).<sup>615</sup> This study contends that this approach to prayer is novel and markedly new when compared to the Old Testament and is directly tied to Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father.

In both parables, the petitions or requests had real consequences on their recipients and are marked by the radical intimacy of friendship (Luke 11) and unprecedented access and persistence (Luke 18).<sup>616</sup> In both accounts, the recipient of the petition did something they did not originally intend to do because of the relationship.<sup>617</sup> The inference was that if audacious and shameless impudence and persistent patience have a serious effect on getting petitions answered in a broken and sinful world, how much more when approaching one’s loving, gracious, generous, and kind Abba Father? If this is true in the natural world, how much more when

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<sup>613</sup> Garland, *Luke*, 737.

<sup>614</sup> Han, *Theology of Prayer in the Gospel of Luke*, 689-690.

<sup>615</sup> Holleran, *Christ’s Prayer and Christian Prayer*, 180.

<sup>616</sup> Stein supports this conclusion, writing, “The basic argument of the parable involves an a fortiori reasoning that culminates in 18:7-8a. Although the conclusion of the argument is in the form of a question that expects a positive answer, it can be reworded as follows: ‘If the unjust judge yielded to the continuous cries of the widow, who was a stranger, and granted her the vindication she sought (the picture part of the parable), how much more will God, who is just and their loving Father (12:30; 11:2), hear the cries of his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night (the reality part).’” Stein, *Luke*, 461.

<sup>617</sup> Garland, *Luke*, 737.

petitioning the loving Father who delights to answer His children and provide for them?<sup>618</sup> There are no parameters or conditions given in these accounts. Only the invitation to ask, seek, and knock and have petitions answered from the believer's Father in Heaven. The clearest rendering and understanding of the significance of these parables then is that human prayer has real effects upon the Lord because He loves and cares for them. God is moved by the prayers of His sons and daughters and He will genuinely respond to them. Prayer is powerful and it truly changes things on earth. The Lord Jesus instructs that there are things that can happen if prayed for that will not happen if not prayed for.<sup>619</sup> Thus, Christ's teaching in both of these parables emphasizes the incredible intimacy and access that believers can have with God as their Father most clearly demonstrated through the practice of prayer in the New Covenant.<sup>620</sup>

In summation, these parables reveal not just the content of Christian prayer (what to pray) but also the means by which believers are to approach God (how to pray). The formative context of Christian prayer according to Jesus is approaching God as Abba Father with the intimacy and access of His sons and daughters. What is a foundational concept in the New Testament based upon Christ's teaching is unprecedented when compared with the Old Testament and Jewish literature. Therefore, the thesis of this study is supported by the biblical text that Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father as revealed most clearly in prayer serve as the hermeneutical key to His teaching on prayer in the New Testament marked by unprecedented intimacy and access to God as Αββα ὁ πατήρ.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 461.

<sup>619</sup> Karl Barth, *Prayer* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 13.

<sup>620</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 461.

<sup>621</sup> The subsequent verses are also insightful in regard to Christian prayer. In another Lukan parable unique to his Gospel, Luke recounts Jesus' teaching concerning the prayers of a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). Just as Jesus stressed repeatedly in Matthew 5-7, the appropriate manner in which to approach God is humbly as a



### *Remaining Lukan Texts Related to God as Father According to Jesus*

The most significant Lukan texts concerning Jesus' use of Father language for God have been discussed. Due to the thesis of this study, priority of exegetical treatment has been given to those texts which are directly related to the practice of Christian prayer according to Jesus. While not exhaustive, an introductory presentation of God as Father according to Jesus in Luke's Gospel has been presented. The remaining texts unique to Luke's Gospel will be briefly addressed to conclude this survey of Luke's Gospel. The first of these is found in Luke 22, "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28-30 ESV). This text emphasizes not the disciples' relationship with God as Father, but rather, "Jesus' filial relationship to God."<sup>622</sup> Thompson notes that of the passages unique to Luke which contain references to God as Father, the emphasis is often on Jesus' unique sonship as the Son of God. In her own words, Luke reveals that, "Jesus' relationship to God as Father is distinctive. Jesus' regular use of 'my Father' points to his unique knowledge of the Father (10:21–22), to his function as the one who mediates the kingdom (11:2; 12:32; 22:29), and to his promise to bestow the Spirit from the Father (11:13; 24:49; Acts 1:4)."<sup>623</sup>

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child dependent upon their father. Jesus condemns the pride and self-reliance of the pharisee and praises the humility of the tax collector. Jesus bookends the parable with the intended purpose and meaning. Luke writes, "Jesus also told this parable to some who were confident that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else... For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9, 14).

<sup>622</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 93.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

This reality is not merely true concerning this text in Luke 22. The final three distinct Lukan texts with Father language for God all emphasize Christ's distinctive identity as the very Son of God. Two exceptional texts come from Calvary, where the crucified Son of God cries out to His Abba. In Luke 23:34, Jesus addresses His prayer for His enemies directly to his Abba Father, "And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments" (Luke 23:34 ESV). Based upon the Lukan material surveyed previously, this text is all the more striking when it is taken into account that during His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus called out to His Abba in prayer as a humble and obedient son. Jesus' invitation to address God as Abba Father in Luke 11 and His call for His disciples to pray for the forgiveness of their enemies is exemplified stunningly in the suffering cries of the son of God. Once again, even in His suffering, the Lord Jesus demonstrates an unprecedented intimacy with and access to God as His personal Abba Father. It was this intimacy and access that He invited His disciples to experience during His life. Now, even in his dying breaths, Jesus continues to illustrate the wonder and beauty of having God as His Abba.

Jesus' final recorded words in Luke's Gospel before His death and resurrection are significant for they form an unmistakable bookend with His first words. As Edwards was quoted as stating earlier, "The first (2:49) and last (24:49) words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke refer to God as his Father. Jesus' intimate and filial relation to God as Father is the center and sum of his life and ministry."<sup>624</sup> This truth has been emphasized countless times in this study. Here, however, the weight of these words is felt even more fully. In Luke 23:46, Jesus' final words were a desperate cry from a son to His Abba, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last." (Luke

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<sup>624</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 3.

23:46 ESV) From the boy Jesus in the temple to the crucified Son of God on the cross, Abba was always on Jesus' lips and was the only manner in which He ever addressed His Father.<sup>625</sup> Twice from the cross, God is addressed as Jesus' Father in an unparalleled and unprecedented manner. This point has been demonstrated time and time again throughout this study and now is demonstrated in the first and last words of Jesus as recorded in Luke's Gospel. What is implicit in Jesus' prayers addressed to God as His personal Abba is made explicit throughout the Gospel in His instruction to His disciples to do the same. Thus, Jesus' Abba cries from the cross not only emphasize the intimate familial relationship and access Jesus enjoyed with God as His Father but also illustrated to His disciples what he had already instructed them. God was their Abba too and they were able to approach Him as such with the same intimacy and access as Jesus.

As Thompson so helpfully clarifies, this is a second focal point of Luke's presentation of God as Father. Not only is God Jesus' Abba Father in an exclusive sense. Rather, as Jesus clearly modeled for them by His personal relationship with God as Father and explicitly instructed them, His disciples were invited to join Him in unprecedented familial intimacy and access like no Jew ever would have presumed to do. In Thompson's words,

Jesus' disciples are included in his relationship to God as Father because Jesus' mission is to mediate the kingdom of his Father and to bestow the Spirit of his Father. Through Jesus' mission, then, the disciples may also call God Father. As Father, God cares for, watches over, and shows mercy and forgiveness to those whom Jesus characterizes as 'the little ones' or 'the little flock.'<sup>626</sup>

Finally, it is not only the boy Jesus or the crucified Son of God who addressed God as Father but the resurrected Christ who continued to witness to the undeniable reality that He understood

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<sup>625</sup> As was stated earlier, the only time recorded that Jesus did not directly address God as Father is found in His recitation of Psalm 22:1 on the cross where He cries out in Aramaic, "'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"(Matthew 27:46 ESV) Thus, every time Lord Jesus addressed God during His life and ministry, He always did so in the context of Father.

<sup>626</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 94.

Himself as the very Son of God and addressed his Father as such. This example comes from Luke 24 where Jesus said, “You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:48-49 ESV). While there are significant theological points that could be addressed in this text, what is pertinent for this study is that once again, it affirms the unified of all the Gospel writers that Jesus was aware of His identity as the Son of God, addressed Yahweh directly and intimately as His Abba father, and invited His disciples to do the same.<sup>627</sup>

*Conclusion: God as Father In Luke’s Gospel*

A few brief comments will be made in summation of the survey of the Fatherhood of God in Luke’s Gospel. First, Luke’s Gospel makes perhaps the most significant contribution concerning the relationship between the Fatherhood of God and Christian prayer.<sup>628</sup> The implications of this will be treated further in the subsequent. For now, there is a case to be made based on Luke’s extensive treatment of the personal prayers of Jesus and His didactic instruction to His disciples concerning the profound development of prayer in the New Testament and its connection to the Fatherhood of God. This transformation of unparalleled intimacy with God and uninhibited access to Him is predicated by the revelation that He is both Jesus and His disciples Abba. It is Christ’s relationship with and revelation of God as Abba that significantly impacts prayer in the Christian life.

Second, Luke contributes a robust presentation of the nature and significance of what it means for God to be Father and how disciples are to relate to Him as such. This is represented by

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<sup>627</sup> For detailed exegetical treatment of this latter section of Luke, in addition to all of the commentaries and resources cited thus far, see the following from the *Word Biblical Commentary Series*, John Nolland, *Luke 18:35 - 24:53* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

<sup>628</sup> Han, *Theology of Prayer in the Gospel of Luke*, 675–93; Stein, *Luke*, 339.

the variance of forms in which Luke transmits Christ's interaction with the Father: "My Father" (4 times), "Your Father" (3 times), "The Father" (4 times), and "Father" (6 times).<sup>629</sup> Based on this data and the treatment of these references, three major points emerge. First, as argued above, Luke emphasizes Jesus' distinctive role as the unique Son of God. Jesus illustrates sonship to God in its utmost sense and this establishes a necessary foundation for what God's role as Father will be for others. Second, the wonderful news of the Gospel is that in Christ and through the New Covenant, Jesus' disciples are to share in His sonship and have intimacy with and access to God as their Abba Father as well. Luke also makes this point exceptionally clear in his Gospel. While this was illustrated in Christ's teaching and invitation for His followers to address God as such, Luke takes extra effort to emphasize this point in his Gospel. When compared with the other Gospels, Luke favors more inclusive references to the Fatherhood of God to include His disciples. As Thompson notes, "One might surmise that Luke has removed the personal pronouns (my, our) precisely to include the disciples in Jesus' own prayers and address to God."<sup>630</sup> Luke's Gospel beautifully illustrates and invites Jesus' disciples to share in the unprecedented intimacy and access with God as their Abba that He has made available for them.

Finally, Luke emphasizes the moral obligation of the children of God to emulate their Father's kindness and mercy.<sup>631</sup> Jesus' teaching grounds believers call to mercy, grace, kindness, generosity, and forgiveness in their Father's example, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most

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<sup>629</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 93. Thompson notes concerning this usage, "Luke might be said to show a slight preference for forms without personal pronouns (the vocative "Father" or the absolute "the Father"), especially when compared with Matthew, but the sample is probably too small to be significant."

<sup>630</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 93.

<sup>631</sup> For more on this theme, see: Reinhard Feldmeier, "'As Your Heavenly Father Is Perfect': The God of the Bible and Commandments in the Gospel." *Interpretation*. 70, no. 4 (2016): 431–444.

High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35-36 ESV). This is a particularly Lukan implication which He adds to the Gospels robust presentation of Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Father and the significant implications this has for His disciples. As Thompson summarizes,

Jesus teaches that this same mercy ought to shape the lives of that little flock. Jesus’ actions and teaching, embodied in his table fellowship with sinners and justified in the parable of the prodigal son, drive home the point of filial and familial obligation in light of God’s mercy. In his own life, Jesus exemplifies the forgiving grace that he calls for from his followers.<sup>632</sup>

Therefore, Luke displays the unique relationship Jesus has with God as His Abba and His identity as the Son of God, the inclusion of Jesus’ disciples in this unprecedented intimacy and access with God as their Father through His invitation and instruction, and finally, the moral implications of what it truly means for disciples to live as children of their Father.<sup>633</sup>

### **God as Father in the Gospel of John**

The final Gospel to be considered is John’s. The centrality of God as Father in the life and ministry of Jesus in John’s Gospel is overwhelming. There are approximately one hundred and twenty uses of *πατήρ* in the Gospel of John which have God as their referent.<sup>634</sup> This number

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<sup>632</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 94. The fact that this is a significant Lukan theme is demonstrated by the continuation of it in the book of Acts. Thompson continues, writing, “Subsequently, Luke depicts the community, particularly in Acts, gathered in the name of the Father and Son as empowered by the Spirit to live out the commands Jesus taught in the Gospels.”

<sup>633</sup> For a work which introduces various interpretive methods for Luke’s Gospel, see the following: Joel B. Green, *Methods for Luke* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>634</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2008), Ixiii. This figure, 120 usages of *πατήρ* comes from Köstenberger and Swain. Morris puts the number at 12; L. Morris, Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 130. Culpepper, Tenney, and Meyer put the number at 118; R.A. Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); M.C. Tenney, “Topics from the Gospel of John. Part I: The Person of the Father,” *BibSac* 132:37-46; P. W. Meyer, “‘The Father’: The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel,” In *Exploring the Gospel of John*, ed. R. A. Culpepper and C. C. Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 255– 273. Finally, Schrenk places the number at 115, G. Schrenk, ‘*Patēr*’, TDNT 5: 1967, 945-958, 974-1022. All of these demonstrate the significant reality that between 155-122 times in the Gospel of John, God is referred to as Father.

is staggering when it is recalled that there are a mere fifteen references to Yahweh as Father in the Old Testament and none of these were direct addresses to Him or have even the slightest resemblance to the unprecedented intimacy and access with which Jesus addresses the Father.<sup>635</sup> Not only this, but John contains more references to God as Father than the rest of the Gospels combined.<sup>636</sup> A final astounding statistic is that the entire New Testament contains roughly two hundred and fifty-five instances of Father applied directly to God.<sup>637</sup> Thus, nearly half of the New Testament occurrences of Father employed for God are found in John's Gospel alone.<sup>638</sup>

While the numerical data is relevant in highlighting the centrality of Jesus' use of Father for God in John's Gospel, the theology contained within is even more pertinent for formulating an understanding of Jesus' relationship with and revelation of His Father.<sup>639</sup> No other Gospel or New Testament book has such a thorough or expansive presentation of God as Father, Jesus' relationship with Him as His Son, and the implications of these historic developments in the Christian life. What was significant in the Synoptics becomes conclusive in John's Gospel that every time Jesus opened His mouth and addressed God directly or spoke of Him in, it was always with the intimate address of Father. As D'Angelo remarks, John's Gospel unequivocally

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<sup>635</sup> Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, Ixiii.

<sup>636</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 133.

<sup>637</sup> Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation of God as Abba*, 498.

<sup>638</sup> If John's other literature is included in this total, than "The Johannine literature accounts for half of the occurrences of "Father" for God." Brad Lee Van Eerden, "John's Depiction of God the Father: An Analysis of the God Language in the Fourth Gospel," In *PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global*, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2003; 2.

<sup>639</sup> As will be seen, the topic of God as Father in John's Gospel is an extensive one which deserves much fuller treatment than is possible here. While this study will focus only on the Johannine texts where Father language is employed for God in relation to prayer, there are a variety of works and recent ones being published which addressed the central topic of God as Father in John. In addition to Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, a few works which treat this subject are; M.M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Meyer, *The Father*, 255–273; D. F. Tolmie, *Jesus' Farewell to the Disciples: John 13:1–17:26 in Narratological Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); M. W. G. Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 44: (1991), 19-38.

presents a “Jesus who always and everywhere uses ‘father’ as his address to God.”<sup>640</sup> This validates the supposition that the Gospel of John has no rival in its indisputably clear emphasis on God as Father and Jesus and His disciples as the children of the Father.<sup>641</sup> The deity and divinity of Jesus as Yahweh’s Son and God as Father to both Jesus and his disciples are central to grasping a Johannine theology.

As can be perceived by the sheer number of instances of πατήρ, the topic of God as Father in John’s Gospel is an extensive one that deserves much fuller treatment than is possible here in this study. The previous analysis of the Synoptic Gospels has laid a rudimentary foundation for the New Testament’s presentation of God’s identity as Father and Jesus and His disciples’ intimacy and access with Him through the new covenant. For the sake of space, this study will focus only on the Johannine texts where Father language is employed for God in relation to prayer. This does not mean that the considerable number of instances where Father language is employed by John or the theological issues that could be addressed are not significant. Rather, due to the nature of this dissertation and the particular thesis that is being explored, the scope of this treatment of John’s Gospel must be limited to the intersection between God as Father and prayer in the life and ministry of Jesus.

The following treatment of John’s Gospel will be divided into three major sections. The first will be an examination of God as Father in the prayers of Jesus. Surprisingly, while John

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<sup>640</sup> Mary Rose D’Angelo. “Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John: Theological Language and ‘Father’ in ‘Prayers of Jesus’.” *Semeia*, no. 85 (1999): 69.

<sup>641</sup> There is only one possible exception to this in John 17:3. However, this usage is not a direct address to the Father but rather an indirect reference to his deity by using θεός. D’Angelo comments concerning this, “In John 17, θεός is used in an oblique address (‘that they may know you, the only true God’ or perhaps ‘that they may know that you are the only true God,’ 17:3). Otherwise, John does not depict Jesus as addressing the deity as ‘God’ (as does Mark 15:34) or ‘Lord’ (Matt 11:25/ Luke 10:21). The narrator does use the euphemisms ‘to heaven’ (17:1) and ‘above’ (11:41) to describe Jesus’ prayerful gaze; the response to Jesus’ prayer in 12:27-28 comes ‘from heaven.’ In all, the Johannine presentation of the deity as the sender and vindicator of Jesus is strikingly manifest.” D’Angelo, *Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John*, 69.



contains more references to God as Father than the rest of the Gospels combined, he only records three prayers of Jesus. These will be treated individually and the implications of this material incorporated into this dissertation. Second, Jesus' farewell or upper room discourse contains the only didactic instruction concerning prayer in John's Gospel directly tied to the Fatherhood of God (John 13-17). These texts will also be treated individually. Finally, while nowhere near exhaustive, section three will be a brief survey and analysis of both John's unique Christology and Patrology. Eerden, in his detailed treatment of the issue, makes the insightful comment that while so much attention is given to formulating Christology and Pneumatology from John's Gospel, Theology Proper or Patrology has been almost entirely ignored in the majority of studies concerning the Johannine literature.<sup>642</sup> Therefore, while outside the primary scope of this dissertation, brief consideration will be given to the overarching presentation of God as Father and Christ as Son in John's Gospel.

#### *God As Father in the Prayers of Jesus*

There are three prayers uttered by Jesus in John's Gospel addressed directly to God as Father (John 11:41; 12:27-28; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25).<sup>643</sup> While the first two are significant, Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the New Testament and provides profound insight into His relationship with and revelation of God as His and His disciples' Father. Each of these prayers will be specifically examined to discern the relationship between Jesus' prayer, His relationship with God as Father, and the implications of these findings for Jesus' disciples and their relation to God as Father through prayer. The thesis which this dissertation has been repeatedly seeking to demonstrate is that Jesus' relationship with

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<sup>642</sup> Eerden, *John's Depiction of God the Father*, 3.

<sup>643</sup> D'Angelo, *Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John*, 69.

and revelation of God as Abba Father is unprecedented and is most clearly demonstrated through the content of His prayers and His teaching concerning prayer. This point is illustrated most definitively in John's Gospel. Jesus' personal prayers and His instruction to His disciples concerning prayer are intricately woven together with the theme of God's intimacy and access to Jesus and His disciples through prayer to God as Abba Father.<sup>644</sup> The hermeneutical key to interpreting Jesus' unprecedented intimacy with and access to God in the Gospels and this unparalleled approach taught to His disciples is found in the intimacy and access to God as Abba offered through prayer in the New Covenant. These claims will be tested in the subsequent exegesis.

*Jesus and the Resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:41)*

The first prayer articulated by Jesus and recorded in John's Gospel is in John 11 and takes place outside of Lazarus' tomb.<sup>645</sup> The immediate context is Lazarus' severe sickness and his sisters' earnest pleading that Christ comes before it is too late.<sup>646</sup> Lazarus dies during Christ's delay, yet Jesus reveals that this was no accident, "It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 12:4 ESV). As Jesus now stood outside of Lazarus' tomb, He commanded that a stone be taken away and the tomb opened. Standing before the empty tomb with the stench of a decomposing corpse, John records the first prayer of Jesus in the

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<sup>644</sup> An insightful study which affirms these claims is one by Barus, Armand Barus, "Prayer and koinonia in the Fourth Gospel" *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, Volume 79 Number 2 (2023). In it, Barus seeks to demonstrate the intimate relationship between prayer and koinonia in John's Gospel. This is a significant contribution to this study in affirming further the correlation between God as father and the intimate nature of New Testament prayer as taught by Jesus.

<sup>645</sup> D'Angelo, *Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John*, 70.

<sup>646</sup> Eerden makes an interesting assertion that from the start, Jesus and Martha's terms employed for God reflect their distinct understanding and perspective of Him. Later, when Jesus does petition God he addresses Him as Πατήρ which forms a fitting contrast to the way both relate to God. Martha's "ὁ θεός" is Jesus' "Πατήρ." When Jesus reached the burial site, he told her that she would see the 'glory of God' (v. 40) and immediately afterwards Jesus begins his prayer." Eerden, *John's Depiction of God the Father*, 232.

Gospel,<sup>647</sup> “And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me” (John 11:41-42 ESV).<sup>648</sup> In addition to the miraculous nature of this story and its incredible attestation to the power and authority of Jesus of Nazareth, there are significant theological ramifications from Jesus’ powerful prayer addressed to His Father.<sup>649</sup>

First, Jesus direct address of God as Πατήρ in the vocative reflects the same theological and linguistic usage as the examples in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>650</sup> All of the previous consideration of this form of prayer directed to God as Father thus applies here in John’s Gospel as well. In all four Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth is attributed as employing a historic, linguistic, and theologically unprecedented and unparalleled form of address to God.<sup>651</sup> This extraordinary approach to Yahweh by Jesus alone in all of Jewish history is most clearly illustrated in the content of His own prayer as is demonstrated here and in His teaching to His disciples concerning prayer. These themes which have been present in the Synoptic Gospels are even more clearly evident in John’s Gospel. It is of the utmost importance to note that every recorded prayer recorded in the Gospels

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<sup>647</sup> Edward W. Klink III, *John* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016), 510.

<sup>648</sup> Murray affirms that this was not a Johannine interpolation but was the authentic prayer of Jesus uttered on behalf of His disciples. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John, Volume 36* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2013), 339-340. Carson also affirms the authenticity of this prayer coming from Jesus as recorded here in John. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 377.

<sup>649</sup> Keener also draws attention to the significant prefiguration of Christ’s own death, burial, and resurrection which were fast approaching with the details here in His prayer and interaction with Lazarus. Keener writes, “Lazarus’s resuscitation prefigures Jesus’ resurrection for the Fourth Gospel, and parallels of language between the two are more than fortuitous, such as the stone (11:38; 20:1), the essential role of a woman close to the deceased (11:39; 20:1– 18), and the wrappings (11:44; 20:6– 7). Nevertheless, the primary purpose of the parallels may be to draw attention to the equally explicit contrasts between the two. In Lazarus’s case, people must remove the stone (11:39), but Jesus’ resurrection produces an immortal body following a different order of existence (cf. 1 Cor 15:42– 44; Phil 3:21); his resurrection may leave the grave clothes untouched (20:5, 7) and allows him to enter closed rooms (20:19, 26).” Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: 2 Volumes* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2010), 837-838.

<sup>650</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 377.

<sup>651</sup> Szymik, *Jesus’ Intitulation of God As Abba*, 497.

coming from the lips of Jesus employs this unprecedented approach to Yahweh not merely as Father but as has been defended, as Abba. The usage here in John 11:41 is just as likely as the other instances in the Synoptics to be yet another example of Jesus praying directly to God not merely as Father but with the intimate and familial Abba. This same point can be made concerning the subsequent two prayers of Jesus addressed in this study and Jesus' teaching about prayer to His disciples.<sup>652</sup>

A second interesting point to note is that the text suggests that Jesus has already prayed to the Father and asked for Lazarus' resurrection before this public prayer.<sup>653</sup> There are two significant elements to this revelation made by Jesus. First, the text highlights the intimate relationship and unity Christ the Son shared with His Father.<sup>654</sup> Verse 11 makes clear that the Father had already revealed to the Son what He intended to do, for Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."<sup>655</sup> John's Gospel proclaims throughout that as the Son of God, Jesus enjoyed an intimate familial unity with the Father and this relationship would prepare His disciples for their invitation to know and commune with the Father just as Jesus does. A second note about Jesus' prior prayer to the Father concerning Lazarus touches another central Johannine theme, the dependence of the Son upon the Father. As Köstenberger and Swain note regarding this text, "The fact that Jesus prays prior to calling Lazarus (who has

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<sup>652</sup> R.H. Fuller makes an insightful contribution here, writing that, "Jesus lives in constant prayer and communication with his Father. When he engages in vocal prayer, he is not entering, as we do, from a state of non-praying into prayer. He is only giving overt expression to what is the ground and base of his life all along. He emerges from non-vocal to vocal prayer here in order to show that the power he needs for his ministry— and here specifically for the raising of Lazarus— depends on the gift of God. It is through that prayer and communion and constant obedience to his Father's will that he is the channel of the Father's saving action. That is why the prayer is thanksgiving rather than petition." R.H. Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles* (London: SCM, 1963), 1058.

<sup>653</sup> Klink, *John*, 510-511.

<sup>654</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2015), 222.

<sup>655</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 377.

been dead for four days) out of the tomb underscores the Gospel's pervasive emphasis on Jesus' total dependence on God in carrying out his mission. As the ensuing events make clear, the Father hears and answers Jesus' prayer."<sup>656</sup> Thus, Jesus demonstrates an unprecedented intimacy and access to the Father as well as complete dependence upon His Abba as they work in unity together.<sup>657</sup>

The public nature of Jesus' prayer accomplishes two major purposes.<sup>658</sup> First, Jesus' prayer itself "Magnifies the intimate union between the Father and the Son, who is in every way 'with God' (1:1)."<sup>659</sup> Jesus is not performing mere theatrics. Rather, the public nature of His prayer which precedes His greatest miracle in the Gospel makes it undeniably clear that this Jesus of Nazareth who claims a unique relationship with God, is vindicated by His father, and His deity affirmed by the immediate and public answer to His prayer.<sup>660</sup> The Father's immediate answer here with the resurrection of Lazarus mirrors His instantaneous answer to Jesus' second prayer in 12:27-28.<sup>661</sup> The deity of the Son is inextricably tied to His revelation of the Father. Thus, the Father's being glorified, which Jesus says was His ultimate aim and the purpose of Lazarus' death and resurrection, simultaneously results in the Son being validated. That is, "From the perspective of God as Father the miracle establishes the credentials of Jesus. He has

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<sup>656</sup> Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, Ixxi.

<sup>657</sup> Klink, *John*, 511.

<sup>658</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 377.

<sup>659</sup> Klink, *John*, 511.

<sup>660</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 838.

<sup>661</sup> Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, Ixxi.

been sent from the Father and is revealed in his unique status. Thus, the Father's desire is to validate the Son and God as θεός manifests Himself before men."<sup>662</sup>

The second feature of Jesus' public prayer here which has significant implications for this study is that, as Carson notes, "The prayer seeks to draw his hearers into the intimacy of Jesus' own relationship with the Father."<sup>663</sup> Miracles taking place due to Jesus' prayers are rare in John's Gospel. The only other potential instance where prayer preceded a miracle is in John 6:11 where Jesus blessed the bread before breaking and multiplying it.<sup>664</sup> However, as Jesus' public ministry approaches its end, His public prayers are beginning to invite His disciples to join Him in addressing God as Abba and to enjoy intimacy with their Father and take advantage of the access to Him that is available to them. Jesus revealed the inner workings of the Trinity when He publicly declared not for Himself but for the sake of "The people standing around" that, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me." Christ the Son lived with the confidence and assurance He was always heard by His Abba and His Father always answered Him. Through His public prayer, "The crowd is directed to see that God as Father always hears Jesus and has initiated his mission."<sup>665</sup>

This invitation for the crowd to join in on the inner workings of the Trinity and the nature of the Father's relationship to His children through prayer prepares the reader for Christ's upcoming instruction concerning prayer to the Father. Here, it is Jesus the Son who has uninhibited access to God as His Father and therefore, the confidence that His requests will be answered. Extraordinarily, "In the testament of Jesus, the power to ask and receive from 'the

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<sup>662</sup> Eerden, *John's Depiction of God the Father*, 232-233.

<sup>663</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 377.

<sup>664</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 838.

<sup>665</sup> Eerden, *John's Depiction of God the Father*, 233.

father' is passed on to the disciples; Jesus will not have to ask on their behalf, because the father loves them (14:13-14; 15:7; 16:23, 26)."<sup>666</sup> The entire thesis of this dissertation could rest on this one point illustrated clearly here in John's Gospel. The Lord Jesus desired that He not only enjoy intimacy and access with God as His Abba Father but that His disciples join him in approaching the Father in this manner. This illustrates the unprecedented development that has occurred with the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth. The Son of God has revealed to the world the wonderful and borderline scandalous reality that in and through Him, all believers have intimate familial access to God as their Abba Father. Jesus' public prayer in John 11:41 begins the journey that will culminate in His farewell discourse to His disciples where this transformation of Christian prayer and the identity of Christ's followers be will be made manifest.

*The Cross and Jesus' Prayer for the Father's Glory (John 12:27-28)*

Jesus' second recorded prayer in John's Gospel reflects many of the same perspectives from the previous discussion. Thus, much of what was addressed above concerning Jesus' direct address of God as Father, His intimacy and access to God illustrated most clearly through prayer, the Father and the Son's unity through submission, the Father's validation of the Son, and Jesus' invitation for His disciples to experience God as Father just as He did will not be treated again here or in the next prayer of Jesus in John 17. What will be commented on are the unique elements of the text which add to this discussion. The text reads as follows, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven: 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again'" (John 12:27-28 ESV).

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<sup>666</sup> D'Angelo, *Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John*, 71.

Jesus' prayer here echoes similar themes to His Gethsemane prayer in the Synoptics.<sup>667</sup> This public prayer of Jesus is the Johannine expression of Jesus' inner struggle and turmoil as He sets Himself resolutely toward Calvary.<sup>668</sup> As Jesus grapples with the will of God and the anguish of the cross, He says that His soul is τετάρακται. Carson notes that "The verb is a strong one, and signifies revulsion, horror, anxiety, agitation."<sup>669</sup> Once again, in the context of Christ's greatest suffering is yet another example of a direct address to God as Father in the vocative which has strong support to represent the Aramaic Abba underlying it. Jesus' prayer then is the sole instance of Christ the perfect and obedient Son of God grappling with the will of His Father. While Jesus considers the coming suffering and agony that He is to face, just as in Gethsemane, He submits and embraces the Father's will as the prototypical obedient Son.<sup>670</sup>

What is the content of His prayer? The glorification of His Father. Just as His troubled soul reflected the synoptic traditions of Gethsemane prayer, now Jesus' prayer for the glorification of His Πατήρ or Abba also reflects the Synoptics and this significant material from the life and ministry of Jesus.<sup>671</sup> Both the Matthean and Lukan accounts contain Jesus' direct instruction from Christ for His disciples to pray for the honor and glory of their Father. Now, though in a unique Johannine fashion, the same theme is present here in this prayer and will be

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<sup>667</sup> D'Angelo, *Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John*, 72.

<sup>668</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 864-865.

<sup>669</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 396.

<sup>670</sup> Concerning the various interpretive possibilities, Carson concludes, "After the deliberative question what shall I say? it seems better to take the next words as a positive prayer: *Father, save me from this hour!* Now Jesus' agony is fully revealed. This prayer is entirely analogous to Gethsemane's 'Take this cup from me' (Mk. 14:36). In both instances the strong adversative follows: *alla*, 'but'—in the one case, 'not what I will, but what you will' (Mk. 14:36), and here, *No (alla)*, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Jesus can no sooner pray to be spared this hour, to escape this cup, than he must face again his unswerving commitment to adhere to his Father's will." Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 396.

<sup>671</sup> Thompson, *John*, 235-236.



developed much more fully in Jesus' high priestly prayer.<sup>672</sup> Thus, the dual concept of prayer for the glorification of God's name revealed by Jesus to be His and believer's Abba Father is a significant theological point that is attested to by both the Synoptics and John's Gospel.

Immediately after His prayer, God the Father's voice booms from heaven to affirm and validate His Son. This is only one of three instances in the life and ministry of Jesus where God the Father speaks in an audible voice so that others can hear.<sup>673</sup> This public affirmation of Jesus the Son serves as an undeniable defense of His unique relationship with God as His father and yet another Johannine witness to Jesus' divinity and deity. As Köstenberger and Swain so insightfully note, "His prayer is promptly answered by a voice from heaven, the only direct utterance by God in this Gospel (12:27–28). Hence the intimacy between Jesus and the Father continues unabated even with the crucifixion rapidly approaching (cf. 12:24)."<sup>674</sup> In both public prayers of Jesus, the Father immediately answers Him in undeniable ways to emphasize their unique relationship and intimacy. Jesus' unprecedented approach to God as His Abba Father is met with unparalleled demonstrations of the Father's affection, affirmation, and power on His behalf.

Finally, just as with the public prayer outside of Lazarus' tomb, this prayer and the Father's response were given "For the benefit of those in attendance and thus gives the audience insight into Jesus' relationship with God (cf. v. 30b)."<sup>675</sup> In both accounts, Jesus is concerned

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<sup>672</sup> Keener explores this concept further, writing, "Jesus then prays for the Father's 'glory' (12:28), a characteristically Johannine equivalent for the earlier passion tradition's 'your will be done' (Mark 14:36). The context has already reminded the reader that Jesus had come in the Father's name (e.g., 12:13) and that the hour had come for Jesus' glory (12:23), which was inseparable from the Father's glory (13:32). This prayer may represent the nucleus which is continued and developed more fully in Jesus' next and final Johannine prayer in ch. 17, which begins with a prayer for God's glory (17:1–5)." Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 864.

<sup>673</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 397.

<sup>674</sup> Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, Ixxi.

<sup>675</sup> Eerden, *John's Depiction of God the Father*, 235.

that His followers understand His revelation of God as Father and the Father's validation of Christ as Son. Here two of the primary Johannine themes converge. Jesus alone reveals the Father to the world and most clearly to His disciples. At the same time, His disciples are in desperate need of understanding His unique identity as the Son of God and to receive Him as such. Thus, both His revelation of the Father and the Father's affirmation of the Son are for the sake of Christ's disciples.<sup>676</sup>

*Abba Father in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (John 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25)*

The final prayer of Jesus to be examined is His extended prayer in John 17 as part of his Farewell Discourse. There is no other text in the New Testament that so clearly and beautifully illustrates the relationship, unity, intimacy, and inner workings of the Trinitarian love of the Father, Son, and Spirit than Jesus' final discourse to His disciples and this extended prayer.<sup>677</sup> There are a myriad of theological implications latent within these texts and the majority of them fall outside the scope of this study.<sup>678</sup> What is of significance here is Jesus' unprecedented relationship with and approach to God as His personal Abba Father in the context of prayer and the subsequent implications this has for His disciples. Once again, many significant elements of

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<sup>676</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 867.

<sup>677</sup> Two studies by Lee which affirm this statement and explore these topics at length are the following: Dorothy A. Lee, "Jesus' Spirituality of [Af]Filiation in the Fourth Gospel." *Religions* 13, no. 7 (2022); Idem., "In the Spirit of Truth: Worship and Prayer in the Gospel of John and the Early Fathers." *Vigiliae Christianae* 58, no. 3 (2004): 293. These works will be utilized in the following treatment of John 17 below and many of the themes and perspective in this section are affirmed by Lee's detailed work represented in these studies.

<sup>678</sup> In addition to all of the sources utilized and referenced thus far concerning John's Gospel, for just a small sampling of recent work being done on these chapters and the variety of theological issues they represent, see the following: P. Verster, "The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John," *Pharos Journal of Theology* Volume 104 Issue 5 (2023); Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Historical and Theological Investigation of John's Gospel* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020); Marianne Meyne Thompson, "The Gospel of John and Early Trinitarian Thought: The Unity of God in John, Irenaeus and Tertullian," *Journal of Early Christian History*, 4:2 (2014), 154-166; Ole Jakob Filtvedt, "The Transcendence and Visibility of the Father in the Gospel of John." *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums*. 108, no. 1 (2017): 90-118; A.J. Akala, "The Prayer: Narrative Analysis and Correlation of the Prologue with the Prayer," In *The Son-Father Relationship and Christological Symbolism in the Gospel of John* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 170-192.

these texts have been addressed in the preceding two prayers of Jesus.<sup>679</sup> The focus now will be given to those unique elements of this prayer with the other elements already addressed serving as helpful background.

This prayer of Jesus often labeled His “High priestly Prayer” or His “Prayer of Consecration” can generally be divided into three sections; Jesus prays for himself (1– 5), He prays for His disciples (6– 19), and He prays for the church (20– 26).<sup>680</sup> This prayer is the conclusion to His Farewell Discourse and reflects the Synoptics tradition of recording Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane before heading to the cross.<sup>681</sup> Many of the same themes from His previous two prayers are illustrated here and the content of His Farewell Discourse serves as the foundational background for the themes of this prayer.<sup>682</sup> For this present study, the most significant elements of this prayer are Jesus’ unprecedented intimacy and approach to God as Abba, the revelation of these truths in the context of prayer addressed to God directly as Father, and the invitation of Jesus’ disciples to follow His example and approach the Father in the same manner.

The prayer opens by tying Jesus’ teaching in the Upper Room Discourse with this prayer, “When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you’” (John 17:1 ESV). Six times and in every instance in this prayer, Jesus’ prayer is recorded as addressing God directly as *πάτερ* in the

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<sup>679</sup> Much of what was addressed above in the preceding two prayers of Jesus concerning Jesus’ direct address of God as Father, His intimacy and access to God illustrated most clearly through prayer, the Father and the Son’s unity through submission, the Father’s validation of the Son, and Jesus’ invitation for His disciples to experience God as Father just as He did will not be treated again. Rather, the focus will be given to those unique elements of this prayer with the other elements serving as helpful background.

<sup>680</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 496-497.

<sup>681</sup> Thompson, *John*, 305-306.

<sup>682</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 867.

vocative, an unprecedented approach to God and one that has been shown repeatedly to most likely reflect an original Aramaic Abba by Jesus.<sup>683</sup> The centrality of God as Father in this prayer and the Farewell Discourse proper (14-16) is astounding when it is considered that there are forty-four references to God as Father in chapters 14-16 plus six more direct prayers to God as Father in chapter 17.<sup>684</sup> There is no other section of Scripture that contains anything close to this kind of density of Father language for God. The densest concentration of direct references to God as Father is found in chapter 14:6-13 where twelve occurrences appear in a span of eight verses.<sup>685</sup> Jesus of Nazareth's unparalleled personal relationship with God as His Abba Father, His example in prayer, and His instruction for His disciples to follow His example are the foundation for the transformation of New Testament prayer and the profound intimacy and access to God available to believers in the New Covenant.

Here, Jesus' prayer for His glorification that He may glorify the Father is the means by which believers enter into the intimate friendship and sonship Christ offered them throughout His teaching in the Farewell Discourse. As Wróbel so eloquently notes,

The prayer of glorification of Jesus opens the earth for Heaven as everyone who raises their eyes to Heaven, and co-operates with the Son in the work of the glorification of the Father during their earthly journey, has an open door to the real life of Heaven and to participation in the glory of the Triune God in the eternal Hour of Glorification. ”<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>683</sup> Klink, *John*, 511.

<sup>684</sup> Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, Ixxii.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>686</sup> M. S. Wróbel, “Theological Concept of the Fourth Gospel in the Context of Jesus’ Glorification Prayer (Jn 17:1-5),” *The Person and the Challenges. The Journal of Theology, Education, Canon Law and Social Studies Inspired by Pope John Paul II*, 7(1), (2017), 240. Wróbel continues, “The glorification of Jesus opens the way of life to all of His followers. Jesus as a New Adam has the power of granting eternal life to all those who accept His message with a living faith and together with Him participate in the glorious worship of the Father.”

It is the Son's glorification of the Father and the Father's glorification of the Son that ushers in the New Covenant with all of its benefits. Similar themes are represented in Jesus' second petition of this prayer, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:5 ESV). Here is another witness to Jesus' glory, divinity, and His unique, intimate, and eternal sonship and relationship with the Father.<sup>687</sup>

Jesus' third petition is astounding in that He prays that the Father may welcome His disciples into the intimate and eternal familial relationship that they have enjoyed "Before the world existed."<sup>688</sup> Jesus prayed, "And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:11 ESV). Two points will be made here, First, Jesus' prayer that His disciples experience the unity of Trinitarian love and that this love from the Father would keep them safe from the world in His name is foundational for understanding how believers gain such intimacy and access to God in the New Covenant. This theme has appeared repeatedly in Jesus' teaching in this section especially concerning prayer. What is clear is that an essential element of the Son of God's mission was revealing the Father to His disciples that in and through Him, they may experience the same intimacy, access, and unity that flows from the heart of trinitarian love. As C.H Dodd so masterfully summarized,

The relation of Father and Son is an eternal relation, not attained in time, nor ceasing with this life, or with the history of this world. The human career of Jesus is, as it were, a projection of this eternal relation (which is the divine ἀγάπη) upon the field of time. It is such, not as a mere reflection, or representation, of the reality, but in the sense that the love which the Father bore the Son 'before the foundation of the world', and which He perpetually returns, is actively at work in the whole historical life of Jesus... The love of

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<sup>687</sup> "Paradoxically this same text, as we have observed, demonstrates Jesus' divine origins and nature; he alone is capable of such face-to-face stance or relation, because he is the eternal Son and shares in the being of θεός." Lee, *In the Spirit of Truth*: 293.

<sup>688</sup> Klink, *John*, 718.

God, thus released in history, brings men into the same unity of which the relation of Father and Son is the eternal archetype.<sup>689</sup>

A second significant element of this prayer is Jesus' use of "Πάτερ ἅγιε" for Yahweh which never appears anywhere else in this Gospel or the New Testament.<sup>690</sup> If this dissertation had to be summarized in one text, this prayer of Jesus could be it. Πάτερ ἅγιε represents an unprecedented direct address of God in prayer as Father demonstrating both intimacy and access yet also recognizing His holiness and offering Him honor and reverence. As the previous chapters have demonstrated at length, there is simply nothing like this in the Old Testament or Jewish history. Jesus did not compromise the Father's holiness by revealing His true nature as Father and addressing Him as Abba. Rather, as Carson captures so well, Πάτερ ἅγιε emulates "A view of God that combines awesome transcendence with familial intimacy."<sup>691</sup>

The Old and New Testament's unified witness to the absolute holiness of God is not compromised by the revelation of Yahweh as Father. Two inextricably intertwined elements of God's personhood are both present in this prayer and Jesus' address Πάτερ ἅγιε; God's transcendence and imminence. Jesus' approach to God as Πάτερ ἅγιε brings the transcendence and imminence of God together in an awe-inspiring manner that is as beautiful as it is revelatory. As Kline notes, "While God's holiness in the OT would have created a distance between God and his people, as the 'Holy Father' he establishes a remarkable closeness by means of his Son."<sup>692</sup> It is only in and through the finished work of Jesus the Son that believers can dare to approach their Πάτερ ἅγιε with the intimacy and access modeled for them by Jesus.

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<sup>689</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1953), 262.

<sup>690</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 504.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid.

<sup>692</sup> Klink, *John*, 718.

The Synoptics have already prepared readers for this correlation of seemingly contradictory themes. Prayer for the glory, honor, and sanctification of Yahweh's name in the Lord's prayer is in general alignment with the Old Testament and Jewish approach to God in prayer.<sup>693</sup> The same could be true for the other petitions for the coming and establishment of God's kingdom, His will to be accomplished, provision for basic needs, forgiveness for sins, and protection from enemies. However, it was Jesus' direct address of God as Abba that was unprecedented and each of the above petitions are offered to Him as such. While the content of His prayer was acceptable, His novel approach to God as Abba Father marked by unparalleled familial intimacy and audacious and borderline blasphemous access to God is what is distinctively new. Thus, what Jesus models here by addressing God as Πάτερ ἅγιε, He didactically instructed His disciples to do in the Lord's prayer.

Two texts from John's Gospel affirm these claims and testify to the reality that Jesus' approach to God was unprecedented for the Jews and drew their persecution. The first is in John 5, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18 ESV). The controversy was that Jesus was "Πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν." As has been treated previously, the Jews did understand themselves corporately as the children of God based upon Yahweh's election of and covenant with them.<sup>694</sup> The Jews in John 5:39 evidence this, appealing to God as their corporate Father. What was unprecedented was that Jesus did not only appeal to God as the corporate Father of Israel but understood Yahweh as His personal Father as demonstrated by His approach and relationship with Him. This point was not misunderstood by

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<sup>693</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1034.

<sup>694</sup> D'Angelo, *Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John*, 77.

the Jews, for in John 19, this is the explanation for their intention to kill him, “The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God’” (John 19:7 ESV). Therefore, Jesus’ relationship with and approach to God as personal Father was serious and controversial enough to warrant the Jew’s murder of Him. Therefore, John’s Gospel which reveals more than any other the nature of Christ’s relationship with God as His Abba also proves how unprecedented and controversial this was for the time. Πάτερ ἄγιε summarizes the thesis of this dissertation that Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father is unprecedented and is most clearly demonstrated through the content of His prayers and His teaching concerning prayer.<sup>695</sup> The Jews opposition of Jesus for these claims demonstrates how novel His approach to God as Abba Father was.

Two final prayers of Jesus in John 17 remain to be discussed. Jesus’ prayers recorded in John 17:20-21 and 17:24-25 echo for all of Jesus’ future followers what He has already prayed for His current disciples.<sup>696</sup> Jesus makes clear in 17:20 that His prayer for His disciples now includes all of those who will believe in Him through the testimony of His disciples. His prayer, then, is “That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21 ESV). Of significance for this study is that the intimate familial relationship that the Son shared with His Abba is the template and paradigm that all of His followers are to emulate and experience.<sup>697</sup>

In Jesus’ final prayer in the chapter, He addresses God as Πατήρ δίκαιε while praying for His disciples to experience His intimate presence and glory,

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<sup>695</sup> Armand Barus, “Prayer and koinonia in the Fourth Gospel” *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies*, Volume 79 Number 2 (2023), 1.

<sup>696</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1038.

<sup>697</sup> Lee, *In the Spirit of Truth*, 294-297.



Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father (Πατήρ δίκαιε), even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. (John 17:24-25 ESV)

Once again, this is a unique approach to God in prayer combining His intimacy and holiness, His immanence with His transcendence, or, as Carson said, His “Awesome transcendence with familial intimacy.”<sup>698</sup> This is not merely illustrated in the address of God as Πατήρ δίκαιε but in the θέλω of the Son of God.<sup>699</sup> Jesus has just revealed in John 17:23 the profound reality that the Father loves all of Jesus’ disciples just as He loves the Son.<sup>700</sup> The longing and desire expressed through the θέλω and prayer of the eternal Son to the Father is that all of His disciples would experience the intimate and familial love that He enjoys with the Father and approach God as His very own children as Jesus has modeled for them. As Klink notes, “The disciples are not being kept by God as outsiders but as those who belong to him, as children with the Father, not as slaves but as adopted ‘sons and daughters’ in the household of God (1:12- 14; 8:32 – 36).”<sup>701</sup> Therefore, Jesus’ final prayer before heading to the cross is that His disciples would know and experience the love of their Abba Father and enjoy the same intimacy and access with Him that Jesus was about to make available to them through His death and resurrection.

#### *Jesus’ Teaching On Prayer in Relation to God as Abba Father*

Jesus’ personal prayers in John 17 establish a significant foundation for understanding the claims of this study. What has been demonstrated repeatedly is the novelty of Jesus’ approach to God as His Abba Father personally. What Jesus’ teaching in John 14-16 makes explicitly clear is

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<sup>698</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 504.

<sup>699</sup> Klink, *John*, 724.

<sup>700</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1040.

<sup>701</sup> Klink, *John*, 718.

that Jesus' approach to God as Abba Father is not reserved to Him as the unique Son of God but is made available to all of His disciples through His finished work at Calvary.<sup>702</sup> New Testament prayer is fundamentally transformed from its Old Testament and Jewish counterpart through the reality that in the New Covenant, believers have the same intimacy and access to God as their Abba Father as Jesus did. This study has sought to demonstrate that Jesus' personal example and didactic instruction concerning New Covenant prayer in the context of God as Abba Father in the Gospels is the hermeneutical key to understanding Christ's novel approach to God and subsequently, that of his disciples. What was sufficiently clear becomes even more prominent in Christ's teaching on prayer that His intention all along is that His disciples would follow His example and enjoy the same intimacy and access with God as their Abba Father as He did. In John's Gospel and more narrowly, within Christ's Farewell Discourse, there are three instances of Jesus' instruction concerning prayer in the context of Father which affirm the thesis of this dissertation that Christ's approach to God as Abba Father is unprecedented and the foundation for New Testament prayer. These will each be examined below.

*Prayer and The Father in John 14:13-14, 15:7, 16:23-24*

The first text to be addressed is John 14:13-14, "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." To begin, Jesus' bold invitation to ask for anything with the guaranteed assurance that it would be done is unparalleled when compared with the ANE, Jewish, and even pagan Graco-Roman backgrounds.<sup>703</sup> The same confidence that Jesus Himself modeled when praying to the Father

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<sup>702</sup> Once again, an insightful study which examines and affirms these points is, Barus, *Prayer and koinonia in the Fourth Gospel*. Barus' focus is on the relationship between koinonia between believers and Jesus as the distinctive mark of New Testament prayer as instructed by Christ.

<sup>703</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 932.

outside of Lazarus' tomb is now granted to His disciples. Believers can have confidence and assurance that ἐάν τι αἰτήσητέ με ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου ἐγὼ ποιήσω. What Jesus taught with parables in Luke concerning the friend at midnight and the persistent widow He now reiterates and reinforces with these direct promises that His disciples ought to have the same confidence and boldness that He had in prayer.

The context for this unprecedented development of Christian prayer is once again the intimate relationship and uninhibited access disciples have with both Jesus the Son and God their Abba Father. There is simply nothing like the confidence and boldness Christ expected His disciples to have based upon their intimacy and access with Him and God their Abba Father anywhere in the disciples' Jewish heritage. The context of familial unity has radically revolutionized the ability with which Christ's disciples are able to relate to God the Father.<sup>704</sup> Therefore, this text and the two following it affirm yet again the foundational claims of this study.

A second significant theological element of this text is that this is the first time the concept of asking in "Jesus'" name is introduced to His disciples.<sup>705</sup> They were not only to trust in His name, honor, and reverence it, and obey Him. Now they were to approach the Father ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου. How should asking in Jesus' name be understood? Two texts are foundational in John's Gospel concerning Christ's ministry in His Father's name. In John 5, Jesus states that "I

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<sup>704</sup> John is not alone in recording Jesus' instruction and invitation for His disciples to approach God in this unprecedented manner. As D'Angelo summarizes so well, "A variety of similar promises appears in contexts that assure believers of their own spiritual and prophetic power. In Mark the withering of the fig tree warrants the faith that moves mountains: 'Therefore I say to you, everything you pray and ask for ... will come to you. When you are praying ... forgive, that your heavenly father may forgive you...' (Mark 11:24-25/Matt 21:22; 6:14). Matt 18:19 proclaims: 'Amen I say to you if two of you agree about whatever you ask from my father in heaven, it will come to you.' Other versions do not refer to the divine father ('Ask and you shall receive," Matt 7:7/Luke 11:9)." D'Angelo, *Intimating Deity in the Gospel of John*, 71.

<sup>705</sup> Klink, *John*, 718.

have come in my Father's name..." In 10:25, Jesus says, "...The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me." While there are various ways of interpreting this concept, there are at least three primary implications that seem to best fit the context of John.

First, as Keener affirms, "Most likely, asking 'in his name' signifies asking as his representative, while about his business, just as Jesus came in his Father's name (5:43; 10:25).<sup>706</sup> This fits the immediate context that Jesus' disciples are to do "greater works" than He did. Just as the Son represented and revealed His Father, so too Jesus' disciples pray and work in His name that the Father be glorified in the Son. Thus, Jesus' ministry and His disciples' ministry have the same goal; the glorification of the Father.<sup>707</sup> Second, Jesus' disciples do not pray or minister on their own authority but doing so in Jesus' name means they go with His authority. Just as the Father gave His authority to Son and the Son humbly honored and submitted to His Father, so too do disciples minister in humble submission to the authority of Christ.<sup>708</sup> This is the only explanation for the disciples' ability to perform even greater works than the Lord Jesus. Third, the preceding context of John 14 illuminates that Jesus' disciples' access to God the Father comes in and through their communion with Jesus His Son. As Jesus will clarify in John 16, disciples ask in Jesus' name but their requests are made to their Father. The finished work of Jesus provides his disciples with the intimacy and access that was impossible for them before. Thus, As His representatives and in His authority, they have been granted intimate access to God

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<sup>706</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 933.

<sup>707</sup> Klink, *John*, 623.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.*

the Father through the name of Jesus the Son with the promise that whatever they ask, it will certainly be done for them.<sup>709</sup>

Jesus' next assertion concerning prayer is, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15: 7 ESV). Many of the same elements from Jesus' invitation to His disciples to pray in His name with the bold confidence of sons and daughters knowing their requests will be granted are present in John 15 as well. The same open-ended invitation and promise to His disciples is present as in 14:13-14 and 16:23-24. However, Jesus adds a condition about abiding in His person, and allowing His words to abide in the disciple's life. These conditions add significant light to what it means to pray in Jesus' name.<sup>710</sup> As Klink notes, "This prayer is not asked in isolation but in the intimate, mutually indwelling relationship between Jesus and the disciples."<sup>711</sup> Interestingly, whereas in 14:13-14 Jesus instructed that prayer is made directly to Him, here, the recipient of prayer is left unaddressed as prayer progresses from being addressed to the Son and instead, believers approach the Father directly.

There appear to be two distinct thoughts here. First, abiding in Jesus based on the context means a genuine love and trust of His personhood and a reception of His authority in one's life as the Messiah. True abiding in Jesus necessarily demands an authentic love and embrace of the

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<sup>709</sup> Keener adds helpful insight concerning the intimacy of this prayer compared with its cultural context. "The intimacy in prayer implied in this image would have appealed to many people in the ancient Mediterranean world on a popular level. As major cults became more formal during the first three centuries of the common era, many people turned toward noncultic religious expressions, such as oracles, for emotional attachment, with a corresponding shift from primarily communal to primarily individual spirituality. 189 *The Fourth Gospel*, more than the Synoptics, emphasizes an individual's relationship with God rather than solely a corporate perspective." Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 933.

<sup>710</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 977.

<sup>711</sup> Klink, *John*, 654.

fullness of who He is and all He has taught.<sup>712</sup> Second, allowing His word to abide inside the believers' stresses obedience to His teaching and subsequently participation in His mission.<sup>713</sup> Just as in John 14, the very next verse connects prayer to the Father being glorified by the fruitfulness of the disciple's life most assuredly brought about through their answered prayer. As Klink notes, "In light of our union with Christ, 'whatever you wish' is not a blank-check prayer but participation in the life and mission of God. It is we who are 'doing' the work of Christ, with the mutual indwelling creating a mutually performed work."<sup>714</sup>

This connection between fruit bearing and prayer appears once again in verse 16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." Thus, it is unmistakably clear that Jesus' invitation to ask whatever they wish is inextricably tied to abiding in His person, obedience to His Word, and cooperation in His mission. The ultimate aim of all prayer in believer's lives is the glorification through the fruitfulness and answered prayers of His children. Jesus modeled this outside of Lazarus' tomb and now invited His disciples to follow His example and do the same.

One final comment will be made concerning the implications of Jesus' teaching on prayer in John 15. The context of John 15 concerning believers' relationship to both Jesus and God the Father not as servants but as friends is transformational. The entire context of Christian prayer is intimate, familial, and here, expressed through friendship. The kind of relationship that was

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<sup>712</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 977.

<sup>713</sup> The NET translators have an insightful comment here, writing, "The two thoughts are really quite similar, since here it is conditioned on the disciples' remaining in Jesus and his words remaining in them. The first phrase relates to the genuineness of their relationship with Jesus. The second phrase relates to their obedience. When both of these qualifications are met, the disciples would in fact be asking in Jesus' name and therefore according to his will." NET Bible, Biblical Studies Press, Study Note, John 15:7.

<sup>714</sup> Klink, *John*, 654.

reserved for a few select individuals in the Old Testament is now made available to every one of Christ's disciples in the New Covenant. All of Jesus' revolutionary teaching concerning Christian prayer and the unprecedented intimacy and access to God as Abba which marks it is explained by the reality that for Jesus, prayer is an expression of intimacy, family, and friendship with God as Abba Father.<sup>715</sup> Thus, as Lee summarized so well,

Believers enter into the filiation of Jesus himself as the living heart of their spirituality. As well as entering Jesus' filiation, disciples are also granted intimate and loving friendship with him as holy Wisdom. Though obedience is called for in this affiliation, and the gulf between God and creation though bridged is never dissolved, the kinship transcends patriarchal relationships. Its purpose lies in "leading the believer to the life-giving experience of intimacy" with God.<sup>716</sup>

In the next example in John 16, prayer is not addressed directly to Jesus but to the Father through Jesus and in His name. Thus, there is a natural progression of disciples having more and more access to God as their Abba Father in prayer. This will become most clear in chapter 16 where believers are instructed to address God the Father directly. Once again, there is no example of anyone in the Old Testament or intertestamental Jewish literature approaching God in this manner or instructing others to do so. Thus, what is a trademark of Jesus' life and ministry is an unprecedented approach to God as Abba which transformed His disciples and subsequently, the New Testament and the entirety of the Christian religion.

The final example of Jesus' teaching on prayer to the Father in the Farewell Discourse comes from chapter 16, "In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23-24 ESV).

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<sup>715</sup> Barus' entire study revolves around this theme Barus, *Prayer and koinonia in the Fourth Gospel*.

<sup>716</sup> Dorothy A. Lee, "Jesus' Spirituality of [Af]Filiation in the Fourth Gospel." *Religions* 13, no. 7 (2022): 9.

Jesus' teaching makes explicitly clear what has been affirmed throughout this study; Jesus' personal and intimate relationship with God as Abba Father was never meant to be reserved for Him solely. Rather, it is the invitation for all disciples to follow His example and enjoy the same intimacy and access to Abba that Jesus the Son of God did. In this text, Jesus grants His disciples an unprecedented honor and privilege related to their Abba, "Direct access to him in prayer."<sup>717</sup> No one had ever demonstrated such intimacy with God as Father much less claimed that their followers could experience it as well. However, as Keener notes, "By going to the Father and returning with the Spirit, Jesus would bring the disciples directly to God: the Father would give their requests directly if they asked as Jesus' representatives instead of depending on Jesus to ask for them."<sup>718</sup>

This is the revolutionary and astounding development of the transformation of the disciples' relationship with God as Abba Father and prayer in the New Testament. The new nature of prayer in Jesus' name has already been discussed. The radical development that takes place here is that through the life and ministry of Jesus and the coming work of the cross, His resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the intimacy and access that was impossible in the Old Covenant is now the inheritance of all of Christ's disciples. The reason no one had ever approached Yahweh with such familial intimacy and boldness is that until the coming of Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, this kind of access was not only untenable but impossible. However, in and through Jesus, all believers can enter into His sonship and receive the same intimate and familial relationship with and access to God as their Abba Father. As Klink notes,

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<sup>717</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1022.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.



The pericope concludes with Jesus reminding his disciples that this kind of prayer, prayer to the Father in Jesus's name, had not yet occurred. It could not take place until Christ made such 'asking' possible, for this kind of asking reflects the new order of the Christian's participation in the life of the Trinitarian God: prayer to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.<sup>719</sup>

This is a point that has been implied but is now made explicit. Both believers' relationship with God as Abba Father and New Testament prayer are categorically distinct from their Old Testament counterparts because, until the coming of Jesus, this kind of intimacy and access to God as Father was impossible. The implications and theological ramifications for this point are significant. Jesus did not merely add a depth of nuance to an already significant Old Testament or Jewish theme. Rather, the New Covenant is markedly and profoundly distinct from the Old, and now, in the New Covenant, what was both unthinkable and impossible is made possible through the life and ministry of Jesus. Carson affirms this perspective, noting that,

The disciples had certainly asked for things, and asked questions; but up to this point they had not asked the Father (v. 23) for things (αἰτέω) in Jesus' name: that was a privilege that belonged to the new order. Now, in anticipation of that new order, the disciples are exhorted, Ask (the verb is still αἰτέω) and you will receive. They are to do this in full recognition that this is the route to the joy Jesus had earlier promised them.<sup>720</sup>

These points are central to the thesis of this dissertation. What has been presented countless times is that the heart of the New Covenant and the theological and hermeneutical key for understanding the transformation of believers' relationship with God as Abba Father and everything that makes the New Covenant distinctly new is most clearly demonstrated through Jesus' personal example and teaching concerning prayer. This Scripture affirms definitively that Jesus desired His disciples to follow His example and experience the same intimacy He did with God as Abba Father. What was true for Jesus' first disciples is true for all of them, "They can

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<sup>719</sup> Klink, *John*, 693.

<sup>720</sup> Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 490.

make their requests directly to the Father (16:26) because the Father loves them on Jesus' behalf (16:27; cf. 15:9–10; 17:23).”<sup>721</sup>

Jesus reveals that all along in chapters 14-16 when He has spoken of prayer ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου, it has always been in the context of prayer addressed to God as Father. Just as Jesus addressed the Father directly in prayer with the intimacy, access, and confidence of His Son, in and through Christ, believers approach God as their Abba Father and follow the example of their Lord. That is, “Jesus declares that the Christian life will involve direct access to God the Father now officially mediated by Christ -“in my name” (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου) -and that the Father himself ‘will give’ (δώσει) what is asked for.”<sup>722</sup> It is the revelation of God as Abba Father and the New Covenant made possible through the finished work of Christ that transforms, revolutionizes, and makes New Testament prayer possible. As evidenced by the early church's retention of Jesus' Aramaic Abba, this point was not missed that in and through Jesus, all believers were granted the same intimacy and access that He modeled and they could approach God as their Abba.<sup>723</sup>

Jesus' example therefore becomes the prototype for all Christians' relationship with and approach to God as Abba Father. Jesus did not merely emulate what it meant to be the unique Son of God. Rather, He set an example for all believers to follow and a template for understanding and approaching God as Abba Father. The death and resurrection of Jesus tore the veil and opened a way for all of Abba's sons and daughters to come home and approach Him with the boldness and confidence of His children. As John makes clear, “After he returns to

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<sup>721</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1023. Keener adds to this, “Jesus is from the Father and returning to the Father (16:28), and so can bring them direct access to, and relationship with, the Father in his name (14:6).”

<sup>722</sup> Klink, *John*, 693.

<sup>723</sup> Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2018), 134.

bestow the Spirit in 20:19– 23, the disciples will pray directly to the Father for themselves (16:23– 26) because he will have given them a new relationship with the Father (16:27) based on his own (16:28).”<sup>724</sup>

Finally, Jesus’ prayer here in John 16:24 is related to John 15:7 where in both instances, Christian prayer is tied to disciples experiencing fullness of joy.<sup>725</sup> The intimate fellowship and communion with God as Abba in Christian prayer and the boldness and confidence produced by the promise of answered prayer has a clear purpose; ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν ᾗ πεπληρωμένη. The gift of unprecedented intimacy with and access to God as Abba Father is the unique privilege of Jesus’ disciples and produces an abounding joy for only in and through Christ is this relationship possible. New Covenant prayer is one of the primary gifts and inheritances given to the church from Christ. Jesus’ invitation to address the Father directly in prayer reveals that “All human beings are called into the same relation, the same filiation, the perpetual return of love to the Father in prayer and worship. Thus they become children of God and participate in Jesus’ Sonship.”<sup>726</sup>

#### *Conclusion: God As Father in John’s Gospel*

This study has not been exhaustive in its treatment of the topic of God as Father in John’s Gospel. As was stated at the outset of this section, the sheer magnitude of content in John’s Gospel concerning the deity and divinity of Jesus, the Son of God (1:49, 3:18, 5:25, 10:36, 11:4, 27, 19:7, 20:31), the hundred plus references to God as Father that this study did not treat, and

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<sup>724</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1026.

<sup>725</sup> Klink adds concerning this point, “Jesus ends his sixth and final statement by exhorting his disciples to ask from God. The disciples, by their personal and functional relationship with the Father, will not only receive what they need but be filled with joy. This kind of prayer is fellowship with God (cf. 1 John 1:6 – 7).” Klink, *John*, 693.

<sup>726</sup> Dorothy Lee, “In the Spirit of Truth: Worship and Prayer in the Gospel of John and the Early Fathers.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 58, no. 3 (2004): 294.

the myriad of other significant theological issues that fall outside the scope of this study, made it impossible to treat them all here.<sup>727</sup> However, the goal has been to examine each text where prayer was related to the revelation of God as Father in Jesus' personal example or His teaching to His disciples. This has been accomplished sufficiently to draw a few final conclusions before discussing the implications of this study. Three major theological points emerge from this survey of prayer in John's Gospel in relation to God as Father.

First, as was demonstrated in the survey of the personal prayers of Jesus, John emphasizes and reveals Jesus' unique relationship with God as His Abba Father as the unique Son of God. Before believers are invited to share in the Trinitarian love of the Father, Son, and Spirit, they must first behold the very Son of God who has made their access to the Father possible. A significant point that was not treated in this study is that though believers share the same Abba with Jesus, John is careful to distinguish between Jesus' unique relationship with the Father and that believers are privileged to experience in and through Jesus the Son. Lee provides an insightful discussion here that,

The implication is that Jesus' filial relationship with the Father has primacy: he is 'the Son' and God is, in a unique sense, 'my Father'. On that basis, disciples can also be affiliated to God as 'your Father' and 'your God' but only by entering into Jesus' filiation, becoming daughters and sons of God, as well sisters and brothers to one another. It is Jesus' identity as the Son that makes possible the restored identity, and thus the spirituality, of believers as children of God.<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>727</sup> In addition to all of the works cited throughout this section, a few other essential works for treating John's Gospel further are the following: Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997); Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995); Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2009); Idem., *Signs of the Messiah: An Introduction to John's Gospel* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2021). William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953); Richard D. Phillips, *John* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2014).

<sup>728</sup> Lee, *Jesus' Spirituality of [Af]Filiation in the Fourth Gospel*, 9.

The text specifically referred to is John 20:7, where after His resurrection but before his ascension, the Lord Jesus declares, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” It is astounding that Jesus emphasizes once again that Yahweh is the Father of His disciples. At the same time, Christ still distinguishes between His relationship with the Father and that of His disciples. Thus, it is only in and through the exclusive relationship of the unique Son of God that Jesus’ disciples have intimacy and access to Yahweh as their Abba Father. Thus, John’s Gospel and Jesus’ prayers reveal Jesus’ unique deity and divinity as the very Son of God.

The second central point from Jesus’ teaching on prayer is His invitation for His disciples to enter into the Trinitarian love of Father, Son, and Spirit and to join Him in addressing God as their Abba Father. If Jesus’ personal prayers emphasized His exclusivity of access to God as His Abba, His instruction in prayer made undeniably clear that all of His disciples were invited to experience this kind of intimacy and access and address God directly as their Abba Father. As Lee writes, “True worship is possible only in the power of the Spirit who gives birth to believers, making them children of God, participants in Jesus’ own filiation.”<sup>729</sup> Jesus’ teaching in John’s Gospel is the most explicitly clear demonstration of one of the foundational claims of this study; believers are meant to experience the same intimacy and access with God as their Abba Father as Jesus did following His example and heeding His teaching. The implications of this reality will be discussed in the next chapter.

Finally, the revolutionary nature of Jesus’ personal example and His teaching concerning New Testament prayer brought about an unprecedented and unparalleled shift in the New Covenant and the New Testament for Christian prayer. The implications for this will also be

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<sup>729</sup> Lee, *In the Spirit of Truth*, 297.

discussed in the next chapter. For now, it will suffice to comment that the New Testament exhibits a radically new approach to prayer addressed directly to God as Abba Father. The intimacy, access, boldness, confidence, and familial nature which mark New Testament Christianity are the direct result of the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

John's Gospel has revealed this more than any other Gospel and made an invaluable contribution not only to Christology but also to often overlooked Patrology and what it means for believers to have God as their Abba Father and the practical outworking of this in their lives. To quote Lee once again "The spirituality of the Fourth Gospel reaches out to the world seeking affiliation, enticing human beings and ultimately all creation into the filiation of Jesus himself, the Word and Wisdom of God, who abides eternally in the presence of God."<sup>730</sup> Thus, the thesis of this study remains. Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father especially as revealed most clearly in prayer serves as the hermeneutical key to His teaching on prayer in the New Testament marked by unprecedented intimacy and access to God as Αββα ὁ πατήρ.

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<sup>730</sup> Lee, *Jesus' Spirituality of [Af]Filiation in the Fourth Gospel*, 9.

## **Chapter 7: A Theology of God as Abba (Father) as the Hermeneutical Key to the Teaching of Christ on Prayer in the Gospels (Theological Implications)**

### **Introduction: Theological Implications of Dissertation**

The previous six chapters have sought to establish a historical, literary, theological, and exegetical foundation for the thesis of this study that the theological and hermeneutical key to understanding the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning prayer is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. That is, Christian prayer is categorically distinct from Old Testament or Jewish Prayer because disciples of the Christ are invited to approach God in an unprecedented manner as their Abba Father just as the Lord Jesus did transforming the entirety of the Christian religion.

Three significant points emerge from these claims based upon the exegetical survey presented in this dissertation of the pertinent ANE backgrounds, the Old Testament text, the Second Temple Jewish period, and the Gospels concerning God as Father. The theological implications of each of the following three major points will be discussed in this chapter before moving to the applications of these in the next. First, this dissertation has affirmed and defended that Jesus of Nazareth's use of Abba as a direct address for God in prayer was unprecedented and unparalleled against the religious background of His time and is transformational and foundational for the entire Christian religion. Second, New Testament prayer is categorically distinct when compared with its Old Testament and Jewish counterparts and the explanation is Jesus' use of Abba for God and His instruction for His disciples to do the same. Finally, Jesus' teaching concerning God as Abba is an invitation to His disciples into the heart of Trinitarian love to enjoy the same intimacy and access with Abba that He did.

All Christians have unprecedented and unparalleled access to God as His sons and daughters most clearly displayed in the extraordinary privilege and gift of Christian prayer in

Jesus' name, empowered by the Holy Spirit, addressed to Abba Father. A final affirmation of these three points based upon the findings of this study will be given here with special emphasis on the theological implications of these conclusions.

### **A Theology of God as Abba (*Father*) as the Hermeneutical Key to the Teaching of Christ on Prayer in the Gospels**

The Fatherhood of God is the heart of the Christian religion. The first words of the historic Apostles Creed, an encapsulation of the unified witness of the Christian church from its inception and throughout the ages opens by declaring God as Father; “I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.”<sup>731</sup> The Nicene Creed joins this affirmation of the centrality of God as Father, opening with the confession, “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.”<sup>732</sup> The Athanasian Creed rounds out the three foundational historic Christian creeds with not only an affirmation of God as Father but a repeated attestation to the centrality of this foundational belief from the earliest days of Christianity: “For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.”<sup>733</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> For more on the Apostles Creed, see: Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *The Apostles' Creed: And Its Early Christian Context* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009). For more information on the creeds in general and specifically the lasting theological significance of the Apostles Creed, see: Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine Through the Apostles' Creed* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016); Stanley D. Gale, *The Christian's Creed* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018).

<sup>732</sup> For a work which treats the Nicene Creed, see: J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Routledge, 2014). Another older work is the following: A. E Burn, *The Nicene Creed* (England: Rivingtons, 1913).

<sup>733</sup> The centrality of God as Father in the Athanasian Creed is undeniable when each of the references to God as Father are considered. God as Father in the Athanasian Creed can be seen on the following quotations: “For the person of the Father is a distinct person... But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal... What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has... The Father is uncreated... The Father is immeasurable... The Father is eternal... the Father is almighty... Thus the Father is God... Thus the Father is Lord... The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone. The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone. The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son. Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers... He is God



The ancient creeds are not alone in affirming the centrality of God as Father as the very heart of Christianity.<sup>734</sup> Each of the thirteen historic creeds of the church affirms the supremacy of God as Father<sup>735</sup> and that Father is the “Christian name for God.”<sup>736</sup> The centrality of God as Father in Christianity is astounding when considered against the historical and religious background examined in this study. Whereas there were only fifteen references to God as Father in the Old Testament and none of them were made directly by any individual understanding God as their Father or they as His child, there are over two hundred and fifty references to God as Father in the New Testament.<sup>737</sup> While over one hundred and fifty of them come from the Gospels, there are at least seventy-five more direct references to God as Father in the remainder of the New Testament.<sup>738</sup> Thus, as will be demonstrated further in this section, the unified witness to the supremacy of God as Father as the confession of the historic church was not a late development but rather represents both the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus as well as the central confession of the earliest Christians from the New Testament times.<sup>739</sup>

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from the essence of the Father... equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity... He is seated at the Father's right hand...” The *Athanasian Creed*.

<sup>734</sup> For further discussion of Christian creeds and their significance, see the following works: Robert W. Jenson, *Canon and Creed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003); Alister McGrath, *Faith and the Creeds* (London: SPCK, 2013); Carl B. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

<sup>735</sup> In addition to the three quoted above, the remaining ten historic Christian creeds which each affirm the centrality of God as Father are the following: Chalcedonian Definition, Augsburg Confession, Belgic Confession, Articles of Religion, Canons of Dort, Westminster Confession, London Baptist Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Westminster Larger Catechism, Westminster Shorter Catechism.

<sup>736</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 200; Fretheim refers to Scripture's affirmation of the Fatherhood of God as a “Controlling metaphor;” Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 11.

<sup>737</sup> Stefan Szymik, “Jesus’ Intitulation Of God As Abba: Its Sources And Impact On The Idea Of The Fatherhood Of God In The New Testament,” *Verbum Vitae* 38/2 (2020) 498.

<sup>738</sup> Jonathan F. Bayes, *The Apostles’ Creed: Truth with Passion* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 25.

<sup>739</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57; Grassi, *Abba’, Father*, 449.

What is the explanation for this? How did such a minor concept in the Old Testament become the central affirmation of God's nature and character and the heart of the Christian religion? Not just a minor concept, but how did an unprecedented approach to God as Abba Father marked by unparalleled intimacy and access become the normative approach to him in the New Testament and all of Christian history?<sup>740</sup> The answer is simple yet profound; Jesus of Nazareth. As Jeremias so famously argued and so eloquently captured, His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father was "The most important linguistic innovation on the part of Jesus."<sup>741</sup> The doctrine of God as Abba Father and believers' exceptional invitation to intimacy with and access to Him as taught in the New Testament and affirmed by the unified witness of the Christian church of all generations owes this distinct Christian understanding of God to the life and ministry of Jesus. As Szymik notes, "Without Jesus of Nazareth and his teaching the extraordinary development of the theological thought about God's fatherhood recorded in the New Testament writings would have been unthinkable."<sup>742</sup>

The weight and wonder of these words must be grasped and the significance of them incorporated into understanding the New Testament, the Christian religion, and the nature and character of God Himself. If not for Jesus' personal example in His life and ministry of what the intimacy and access of the Son of God with His Abba Father looked like, this revelation of God would have never been grasped (Hebrews 1:1-3). The heart of the Christian faith and the central and foundational doctrine of God as Father are tied directly to Jesus. Not only His own relationship with God as Father, but as examined in the previous chapter, Jesus' teaching

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<sup>740</sup> Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 29.

<sup>741</sup> Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 36.

<sup>742</sup> Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation of God As Abba*, 497.

concerning God as Father, believers as His children, and the intimacy and access they can experience with the Father as their Abba through Jesus the Son was most clearly demonstrated through the distinct revelation and development of Christian prayer. Once again, the theology of God as Father rests on the shoulders of Christ for, “All the literary texts-witnesses preserved in the New Testament and all rational premises point to Jesus of Nazareth as the source and starting point of the New Testament theology of God the Father.”<sup>743</sup>

Thus, the major topic of this dissertation has been thoroughly defended that Jesus of Nazareth’s use of Abba as a direct address for God in prayer was unprecedented and unparalleled against the religious background of His time and is transformational and foundational for the entire Christian religion. Two final pieces of evidence will be presented in favor of this first claim with a focus on their theological implications.

*Paul’s Use of Αββα ὁ Πατήρ to Greek-Speaking Christians in Corinth and Rome and its Theological Significance for the Early Church*

One significant affirmation of these views which has been briefly referenced is that Paul’s use of the Aramaic Abba to Greek-speaking Christians in Corinth and Rome is evidence of Christ’s usage of this term and the significance that Christ’s personal example and instruction had on the early church. In Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6, Paul uses the bilingual phrase, Αββα ὁ Πατήρ.<sup>744</sup> Outside of the Gospels, these are the only other two places where Αββα appears in the New Testament. It is shocking of all of the places where it would be expected for Αββα to be employed, it is in Paul’s writing to these two primarily Gentile and Greek-speaking congregations. As Thompson highlights, “What is particularly arresting about the appearance of

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<sup>743</sup> Szymik, *Jesus’ Intitulation of God As Abba*, 498-499.

<sup>744</sup> Thomas Scott Caulley, “The Place of Abba in Mark’s Christology.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32, no. 4 (2022): 394-416.

*abba* in these Pauline letters is the use of an Aramaic word in Greek epistles written to predominantly Gentile churches.”<sup>745</sup> This begs the crucial question, why does Paul employ the Aramaic Αββα with the Greek ὁ Πατήρ to a congregation who most likely would not understand the Aramaic, and for this reason, he includes the translation?

There is overwhelming support across a wide spectrum of scholars that the continued use of Αββα ὁ Πατήρ outside of Palestine by Greek-speaking Gentile Christians represents both that this was Jesus’ frequent address of God in prayer, His instruction to His disciples in the Lord’s prayer, and that because of this, Αββα was retained even among non-Aramaic speaking Christians due to the theological significance and implications which it bore.<sup>746</sup> As Stein affirms, “The presence of the Aramaic word, in letters written in Greek to the Roman and Galatian Christians, indicates that Jesus’ use of this title and the early repetition of the Lord’s Prayer were so meaningful that the Gentile church continued to call God ‘Abba’ even though it was a foreign word.”<sup>747</sup> It is astounding to note that Jesus’ earliest disciples not only followed His example of addressing God as Father in prayer; they even retained His original language to heed His instruction and enjoy the very intimacy and access with God as Abba Father that He enjoyed.<sup>748</sup> Marshall affirms that it was Jesus’ example and instruction to His disciples that serves as the

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<sup>745</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 68.

<sup>746</sup> Taylor summarizes the options as follows: “Must be either a primitive liturgical formula in a bilingual Church or the usage of Jesus himself.”<sup>746</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 553.

<sup>747</sup> Robert A. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 340. Stein prefaces this statement by adding, “The importance of this title is also witnessed to in that we still possess three instances in the NT of the original word ‘Abba’ (Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6).”

<sup>748</sup> Verbrugge links Jesus’ original use of Abba to Paul’s employment of the same here, writing, “Note especially Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6, where Paul may have been thinking of the Lord’s Prayer. In the oldest version of this prayer (Lk 11:2–4), the invocation reads πατήρ, “[dear] Father,” and suggests ‘abba’ as the Aramaic original.” Verbrugge, *Αββά*, 1.

foundation of New Testament prayer and explains Paul's usage of Ἀββὰ ὁ Πατήρ as "The basis for the form of address used in prayer in the early church (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6)."<sup>749</sup>

There is no other explanation for the employment of this unprecedented approach to God as Ἀββὰ ὁ Πατήρ other than the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>750</sup> As was presented earlier, one explanation for the continued usage of this term outside of Palestine and Aramaic-speaking regions is that it represents the opening words of the Lord's Prayer and gained significance both as the remnant of Jesus' words in His original language as well as liturgical significance representing the normative prayer for all of Christ's disciples.<sup>751</sup> Thayer adheres to this position noting that Ἀββὰ ὁ Πατήρ, "Through frequent use in prayer, it gradually acquired the nature of a most sacred proper name, to which the Greek-speaking Jews added the appellative from their tongue."<sup>752</sup> These two points explain the presence of this Aramaism far outside of Palestine and Aramaic contexts. As Caulley affirms as well, "The bilingual phrase Ἀββὰ ὁ πατήρ (Abba Father) apparently traveled as a unit, coming to Paul from the Aramaic-speaking church as retained in bilingual Hellenistic-Jewish churches."<sup>753</sup>

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<sup>749</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 456.

<sup>750</sup> The support for this claim is overwhelming and nearly unanimous. Although there is a possibility Paul's letter to the Galatians was written before Mark's Gospel, not one example has been found of a scholar arguing that Ἀββὰ ὁ Πατήρ is Pauline. Rather, all the evidence asserts that this is an extremely early witness to the very words and theology of Jesus of Nazareth retained in His own language for the theological weight which this term bears.

<sup>751</sup> Kittel affirms this, writing, "When the Aramaic term is used in the Greek Epistles of Paul (R. 8:15; Gl. 4:6), there may well underlie it a liturgical reminiscence, possibly the beginning of the Lord's Prayer." Kittel, "Ἀββᾶ, 6.

<sup>752</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm, and Christian Gottlob Wilke, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Ἀββᾶ. Thayer's entire quote is as follows: "A customary title of God in prayer. Whenever it occurs in the N. T. (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6) it has the Greek interpretation subjoined to it; this is apparently to be explained by the fact that the Chaldee אבא, through frequent use in prayer, gradually acquired the nature of a most sacred proper name, to which the Greek-speaking Jews added the appellative from their own tongue."

<sup>753</sup> Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology*, 396.

Again, the scholarly support and attestation that Paul's use of  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha \acute{o} \pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  confirms Jesus' usage of  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  in His prayers and His teaching to His disciples is overwhelming.<sup>754</sup> In addition, the retention of this phrase not only illustrates the historical fact that Jesus of Nazareth addressed God directly as His  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  and instructed His disciples to do the same, but that this usage had such significant effects upon His earliest disciples that even among His followers who did not speak Aramaic, they retained His original  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  due to its theological significance and implications. It was for this reason that "The early church took over the use of 'abbā' in prayer."<sup>755</sup>

The theological significance and implications of not only Jesus' original usage of  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  for God in prayer and teaching but also the fact that the early church followed His lead in adopting this approach to God and addressed Him with both the intimacy and access of Christ is astounding.<sup>756</sup> It is for this reason that this study has affirmed that the heart of Christianity and the element that makes it categorically and definitively new and distinct from the Old Covenant is Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. Marshall affirms this view, writing, "The use of the intimate form was the amazing new thing that Jesus wished to teach his disciples, initiating them into the same close relationship with the Father that he enjoyed, and it is improbable that the early Christian usage can be explained apart from a definite command by Jesus himself."<sup>757</sup> Jesus' unprecedented approach to God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  and His disciple's obedience to

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<sup>754</sup> To quote Verbrugge once more, "It seems clear from the Gospel tradition-indirectly confirmed in Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6 - that Jesus addressed God in his prayers as 'my Father.' In so doing, he made use of the warm, familiar term 'abbā', used in the everyday life of the family."<sup>754</sup> Verbrugge, *Ἀββᾶ*, 1. Marshall too affirms that this is the most probable position noting that in reference to Jesus' use of Father in the Lord's Prayer, "There is fairly general agreement that it represents Aramaic 'abbā.'" Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 456.

<sup>755</sup> Verbrugge, *Ἀββᾶ*, 1.

<sup>756</sup> For more on this, see: Svetlana Khobnya, *The Father Who Redeems and the Son Who Obeys: Consideration of Paul's Teaching in Romans* (Havertown: James Clarke Company, 2014), 58-60.

<sup>757</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 456-457.

follow His example illustrates assertions of this dissertation that the hermeneutical key to Christ's teaching on prayer in the Gospels distinguished by unparalleled intimacy and access to God can be traced back to one word;  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$ .

Again, " $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  is not found in direct address to God in ancient Judaism..."<sup>758</sup> As Jeremias argued and has been affirmed throughout this study, "Nowhere in the entire wealth of devotional literature produced by ancient Judaism do we find  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  used as a way of addressing God. The pious Jew knew too much of the great gap between God and humanity (Eccl. 5:1) to be free to address God with the familiar word used in everyday family life."<sup>759</sup> The entirety of the Old Testament and the pertinent material from Second Temple Jewish literature has been surveyed and there are no examples of anyone addressing God directly as their Father or Abba with the intimacy, access, confidence, or assurance of Jesus of Nazareth or as His disciples would do later in the New Testament. As will be demonstrated, this would transform the entirety of the Christian religion and especially Christian prayer.<sup>760</sup> For now, the point to be made is that  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  represents the unprecedented approach of Jesus of Nazareth which was transformational for His disciples demonstrated by their continued use of this Aramaic term and illustrates the heart of Jesus' message and that which marks the new covenant as definitively and categorically new. As Kittle stated so well,

There can be no doubt that the use of the word in the community is linked with Jesus' term for God and thus denotes an appropriation of the relationship proclaimed and lived out by Him. Jewish usage shows how this Father-child relationship to God far surpasses

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<sup>758</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids.: Eerdmans, 1990-), 1.

<sup>759</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge, " $\text{Αββ}\acute{\alpha}$ ," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Abridged Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1.

<sup>760</sup> These two points will be addressed in the following sections.

any possibilities of intimacy assumed in Judaism, introducing indeed something which is wholly new.<sup>761</sup>

*The Explosion of Father Language in the New Testament and the Supremacy of God as Abba in the New Covenant*

A second key affirmation of this dissertation's claim that God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  is the hermeneutical key to the teaching of Christ on prayer in the Gospels is the explosion of Father language in the New Testament and the supremacy of God as Abba in the New Covenant. This fact was mentioned above and will be mentioned here only briefly.<sup>762</sup> Once again, whereas there were only fifteen references to God as Father in the Old Testament and none of them made directly by any individual understanding God as their Father or they as His child, there are over two hundred and fifty references to God as Father in the New Testament.<sup>763</sup> While over one hundred and fifty of them come from the Gospels, there are at least seventy-five more direct references to God as Father in the remainder of the New Testament.<sup>764</sup>

What is undeniable is that the centrality of God as Father in the New Testament is traced directly to the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>765</sup> The explosion of Father language for God in the New Testament and the transformation of the New Covenant distinguished by the supremacy of imagery for God as Father is the result of Jesus' transformational teaching. God as

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<sup>761</sup> Kittel, "Abba", 6.

<sup>762</sup> A theology of God as Father in the New Testament with its emphasis on the epistles and material outside the Gospels is a significant topic which deserves a study of its own. While this has significant theological implications for this study, the major focus here is on the Gospels and Jesus' understanding of God as His  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$ . Further work must be done in developing an extensive and holistic Biblical and or systematic theological study of God as Father in the New Testament outside of the Gospels. One work which comes close but focuses primarily on the Gospels is by Thompson: Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

<sup>763</sup> Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation Of God As Abba*, 498.

<sup>764</sup> Bayes, *The Apostles' Creed*, 25.

<sup>765</sup> Szymik, *Jesus' Intitulation Of God As Abba*, 497.



Father in New Testament prayer will be addressed in the next subsection. Here, a brief survey of the centrality of God in the New Testament will be provided to demonstrate the profound impact the life and teaching of Jesus concerning His Abba had upon His disciples and the entirety of the Christian religion.

### **God as Father in Paul**

To begin, there are just over forty references to God as Father in the Pauline writings.<sup>766</sup> This means that there are nearly three times more references to God as Father in Paul's writings than in the entirety of the Old Testament.<sup>767</sup> This itself is a witness to the transformative nature of Christ's unprecedented development of the Old Testament theme of God as Father. Paul, who was not one of Jesus' original disciples during His earthly life and ministry reflects that Father is the heart of the Christian religion. Based upon Paul's Jewish heritage and training, His usage and approach to God as Father should reflect the Old Testament. However, apart from Jesus, no other New Testament author or character reflects the boldness with which Paul follows the example and instruction of Jesus in addressing and relating to God as Abba Father. In fact, as will be treated even further concerning New Testament prayer, Paul is the only New Testament author to maintain Jesus' original Aramaic in the phrase *αββα ο πατηρ*. In addition to this, apart from Jesus, Paul contributes more than any New Testament author to the New Testament theology of Christian prayer addressed to God not only as Father but *αββα ο πατηρ*.<sup>768</sup> Therefore, Paul is a

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<sup>766</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 118.

<sup>767</sup> The Fatherhood of God in the life, ministry, writing, and theology of Paul is an extensive topic which deserves far treatment than can be given here. Lamentably, all that can be provided in this study is a mere surface level overview. For one work which treats this work in-depth, see the following by Mengestu: Abera M. Mengestu, *God as Father in Paul: Kinship Language and Identity Formation in Early Christianity* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013)

<sup>768</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 116.

significant source of revelation concerning the transformational nature of Jesus' use of Abba for God and the implications this had for the early church, Christianity, and subsequently all generations of those who have the honor and privilege of joining Paul and Jesus in calling God *αββα ὁ πατήρ*.

One of the primary places Father language is found in Paul is in His greetings and benedictions. It is astounding to note that every letter in the Pauline corpus contains some form of greeting, prayer, or blessing once or several times appealing to God as "Our father,"<sup>769</sup> "The father,"<sup>770</sup> or "The father of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>771,772</sup> This means that for Paul, every one of his letters is placed within the context of God as Father.<sup>773</sup> Thus, though *θεός* appears about five hundred times in Paul, there is not a letter where it is not explicitly clarified that the *θεός* which Paul refers to is *αββα ὁ πατήρ*.<sup>774</sup> It is not an overstatement then to assert that Pauline theology is fundamentally rooted in the centrality of God as Father in the Christian life. This is true in Paul's didactic teaching and just as in the life and ministry of Christ, it is most clearly illustrated in His own prayers and the revelation that Christian prayer is the unprecedented Spirit-empowered cry of *αββα ὁ πατήρ* with the Lord Jesus.<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>769</sup> Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3–4; Eph. 1:2, Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2, 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:1–2; Phlm. 3.

<sup>770</sup> Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4.

<sup>771</sup> 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3.

<sup>772</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 118.

<sup>773</sup> "The affirmation that God is the Father of Jew and Gentile is critical to understanding God as Father (Rom. 3:29–30; cf. 1:16). Already at the outset, the epistle's inclusive emphasis is distilled in its address to *all* those who are in Rome, and its affirmation of God is as '*our* Father.'" Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 121.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.*, 116–118.

<sup>775</sup> For an extensive treatment of the theology of the Apostle Paul and much more detailed than this dissertation can offer, see: James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998).

The two most significant texts to understanding the centrality of God as Father in the New Testament outside of the Gospels and specifically for Paul are Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6.<sup>776</sup> Thompson refers to these as “The *locus classicus* for understanding the Fatherhood of God in Paul.”<sup>777</sup> As already defended above, in both instances, Paul’s surprising employment of the Aramaic term in the bilingual phrase *αββα ο πατήρ* to primarily Greek-speaking Gentile Christians, “Recalls Jesus’ own usage of the term in addressing God.”<sup>778</sup> These texts are two of Paul’s most detailed insights into the heart and nature of New Testament prayer which is only possible because of believers’ adoption by God as *αββα ο πατήρ* in and through the life and finished work of Jesus Christ.<sup>779</sup> Thus, three central themes of this dissertation converge in this text; the centrality of God as *αββα ο πατήρ*, the transformation of Christian prayer and the new covenant, and the significance that these truths are revealed in the context of prayer.

The rest of the Pauline literature and the New Testament texts affirm the centrality of God as Father in the life and theology of the early church due to the transformational revelation of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>780</sup> In Romans 6:4, believers walk in newness of life just as Christ was

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<sup>776</sup> These two texts will be treated in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>777</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 126.

<sup>778</sup> Khobnya, *The Father Who Redeems and the Son Who Obeys*, 58.

<sup>779</sup> It is significant that Paul includes both Jews and Gentiles in the need for adoption in and through Christ. Khobnya has a detailed treatment of this text and writes, “Paul places the adoption of both Jews and Gentiles into God’s family on the same level when he states that those who live according to the Spirit of Christ belong to God the Father. It is a radical claim that Jews need to be adopted into the family of God through Christ just as Gentiles. Although theirs is the adoption as sons, as well as the covenants, the law, the temple worship (9:5), still not all of them are true Israelites or children of Abraham or of God for that matter (9:6–7). Their staying in God’s promises depends on God’s call and faith in God’s promises (4:13–14; 9). For Paul, God has fulfilled his promises in Christ; and he has called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles (1:1–5; 9:24–29; 15:8–12). Jesus Christ is the firstborn among many brothers and sisters who are to be conformed to him (8:28–29).” Khobnya, *The Father Who Redeems and the Son Who Obeys*, 63.

<sup>780</sup> As referenced above, every Pauline letter opens with a greeting appealing to God as Father and many contain a similar ending. For this reason, these texts will not be addressed here. However, this does not mean that they are not significant for our study here. The fact that Paul opens every one of his letters appealing to God as Father and includes this in many of his closings affirms the point that this study and this section are trying to make;

raised by the “Glory of the Father.” In Romans 15:6, Jews and Gentiles gather together to both glorify “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul writes that there is only “One God, the Father,” and emphasizes that the God of the Christian faith is to be known and addressed as Father. In 1 Corinthians 15:24, Jesus delivers the Kingdom to “God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.” In his opening greeting and benediction to the church in 2 Corinthians 1:2-3, God is referenced as not only the Father of Jesus Christ but also as “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” for all believers. In Galatians 1:3-4, after clarifying that God is the Father of Jesus who raised Him from the dead (1:1), Paul states twice that God is also “Our father” (πατὴρ ἡμῶν) and states that Jesus’ obedience to the “Will of God” (τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ) was rendered to πατὴρ ἡμῶν. As will be treated further in the subsequent section, this is significant for it continues to reveal further the discussion that Jesus began that believers are welcomed into the Trinitarian community of love to experience God as ἀββὰ ὁ πατήρ just as He did. For Paul, God is the Father of both the Lord Jesus and of all Christians who have the privilege of addressing Him as πατὴρ ἡμῶν.<sup>781</sup>

In Ephesians, there are more references to God as Father than any other book in the Pauline corpus.<sup>782</sup> Outside of the opening and closing benedictions bookending the letter with the identity, centrality, and significance of God as Father, there are six references to God as Father. Ephesians contributes to constructing a Pauline theology of prayer from his own prayers in the book, but the central theme of Ephesians in appealing so frequently to God as Father is the unity

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God as Father is central to the heart of the New Testament message based upon the transformational teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. For more on this, see Thompson: Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 116.

<sup>781</sup> For a work which explores Abba language and emphasizes the believer’s status as children of God, see the following, David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (United Kingdom: University Press, 1967), 268, 273, 277.

<sup>782</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 121-122.

of Jews and Gentiles together in the family of God. In Ephesians, believers are blessed in Christ with “Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” by “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3). In 1:17 in Paul’s own prayer, Jesus’ emphasis on both the transcendence and imminence and Yahweh’s supreme holiness coupled with His intimate love and affection as Father is reflected when Paul refers to Him as “The Father of glory” (ὁ πατὴρ τῆς δόξης). Amazingly, emphasizing another Pauline theme, it is only in and through Jesus that both Jews and Gentiles “Have access in one Spirit to the Father” (2:18). Paul’s beautiful pastoral and intercessory prayer in 3:14 is addressed directly to “The Father.” Again, Paul highlights both God’s divinity and paternity affirming that there is only “One God and Father of all.” (εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων). Following the theological paradigm established by Jesus, Paul urges that Christian prayer and worship be offered to “God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:20). Thus, while all of the Pauline letters emphasize the centrality of God as Father and the theological significance of this for the Christian life, Ephesians stresses more than any other that:

Those who are in Christ are the family of God, according to Paul. Through belonging to Christ and by the Spirit ‘we,’ including both Jews and Gentiles, call God ‘Abba, Father.’ In Christ through the Spirit, a new family of God has been formed that has renewed relationship with God the Father. In a formula of adoption Jews and Gentiles alike become God’s children, like a new Israel with the provision to address God as Father and to become God’s heirs and co-heirs with his own Son.<sup>783</sup>

In Philippians, the glorification of Jesus is for the “Glory of God the Father” (2:11). In Colossians, once again worship and prayer are offered to “The Father” (1:3, 1:12), and the whole Christian life is meant to be lived for the glory of the Father in and through Jesus (3:17). In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul gives thanks “Our God and Father” (τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν) for believers good works. In his closing prayer, twice Paul appeals again to “Our God and Father” as the one who will “Direct our way to you” (3:11) and more importantly, who will “Establish your

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<sup>783</sup> Khobnya, *The Father Who Redeems and the Son Who Obeys*, 63.

hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (3:13). In 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, Paul appeals to “Our God and Father,” “God our Father,” and “God the Father.”

Two final points must be made concerning the centrality of God the Father in the New Testament and specifically here in the Pauline literature. First, the explosion of Father language for God in Paul represents the transformation and significance of Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Father. Paul’s theology is steeped in the reality of God as Father as evidenced in the central role of God as *αββα ο πατήρ* in each of his letters. Second, it is astounding that “Paul’s most common way of referring to God as Father includes the plural possessive pronoun; hence, some form of ‘our Father.’”<sup>784</sup> For Paul, God is not only the Father of the Lord Jesus, but rather, he is both *αββα ο πατήρ* and *πατρός ἡμῶν*. Believers have been adopted into the family of God in and through Jesus and now have the privilege of approaching God just as He did as *αββα ο πατήρ* and *πατρός ἡμῶν*.

### **God as Father in the Rest of the New Testament**

The Pauline literature has demonstrated definitively the transformational nature of Jesus’ teaching concerning God as Father and the subsequent effects it had upon the Christian religion based upon the life, ministry, teaching, and example of Jesus. The explosion of Father language for God and the supremacy of God as Abba Father in the New Testament is not limited to the Pauline literature but is also attested by all of the New Testament authors. Perhaps what is of most significance is not that there are extended sections of teaching or didactic explanations of the doctrine of God as Father in the New Testament, but rather that for all of the New Testament

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<sup>784</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 118.

authors, God as Father is “assumed.”<sup>785</sup> As was elaborated upon at length concerning the Christological foundation of Jesus’ use of Father language for God and especially Abba in the Pauline literature is also relevant here. The entirety of the Christian religion was transformed from its Jewish heritage primarily by Jesus’ unprecedented employment of Father as the direct and only address for God which subsequently became the primary means of understanding God in the New Testament.<sup>786</sup>

The Judaism of Jesus’ disciples was profoundly transformed with the coming of Christ and particularly, His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. This has been demonstrated time and time again in various ways, but the foundational belief and presence of Father language for God in the New Testament further affirms just how significant an element of Jesus’ life and ministry this was. Concerning this transformation of Judaism’s relative silence on God as Father and the centrality of this concept in Christianity, Wilhelm Bousset, Rudolf Bultmann’s teacher, wrote, “What is most completely original and truly creative in the preaching of Jesus comes out most strongly and purely when he proclaims God the heavenly Father... The (Judaism of Jesus’ time) had neither in name nor in fact the faith of the Father-God; it could not possibly rise to it.”<sup>787</sup> Bultmann reiterated Bousset’s views that Jesus had declared the unprecedented idea within traditional Judaism that God is Father His and believer’s personal, intimate, and accessible Abba Father against a view of God as a distant and remote sovereign as reflected in their typical addresses to Him in prayer:

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<sup>785</sup> Bayes makes this affirmation, writing, “In the rest of the New Testament the theme of God’s Fatherhood is not greatly elaborated, though it is assumed.” Bayes, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 30.

<sup>786</sup> For a discussion of God as Father in the early Greek Christian literature, see: Peter Widdicombe, “Fatherhood and the Conception of God in Early Greek Christian Literature.” *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 3 (2000): 519-36.

<sup>787</sup> Wilhelm Bousset, *Jesu Predigt in ihrem Gegensatz zum Judentum: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1892), 41, 43.

(In Judaism) God had retreated far off into the distance as the transcendent heavenly King, and His sway over the present could barely still be made out. For Jesus, God again became a God at hand. This contrast finds expression in the respective forms of address used in prayer. Compare the ornate, emotional, often liturgically beautiful, but often overloaded forms of address in Jewish prayer with the stark simplicity of ‘Father’!... Unlike the prophets' preaching his preaching is directed not primarily to the people as a whole, but to individuals.<sup>788</sup>

Again, the only plausible explanation for the unprecedented and unexpected development of a minor theme in the Old Testament becoming the primary means of understanding and addressing God can be explained by Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father.

Blomberg refers to Jesus' address and teaching concerning God as abba Father “As distinctive and characteristic as any feature of Jesus' teaching”<sup>789</sup> and that it “Represents the unusually intimate relationship Jesus claims to have with his heavenly Father.”<sup>790</sup> It was the significance and centrality of this teaching in the life and ministry that led to its retention by the early church and serves as the foundation for the theology of God as Father in the New Testament and all of Church history.<sup>791</sup>

In the book of Hebrews, believers are referenced as “sons” for God is their Father who treats them as His sons and disciplines them as needed (Hebrews 12:7,9). In James, God is the “Father of lights” (τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων) “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” and who graciously and generously provides every good gift and every perfect gift from above (1:17). Believers are charged to practice “Pure and undefiled before God the Father” by

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<sup>788</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955) 1:23, 25.

<sup>789</sup> For the entire quote, Blomberg writes, “Possibly as distinctive and characteristic as any feature of Jesus' teaching about God appears in his use of the term of endearment Abba for his heavenly Father (Mark 14:36)—not quite, but leaning in the direction of “Daddy.” Although preserved in transliteration in the Greek only this one time in the Gospels, it presumably lies behind uses of Πατήρ elsewhere, especially when used in the vocative (Πατήρ) for direct address.” Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 22.

<sup>790</sup> Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 313.

<sup>791</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Leicester: IVP, 1976), 59.



caring for orphans and widows and embracing a life of holiness (1:27). In 3:9, James references “our Lord and Father” (τὸν κύριον καὶ πατέρα) illustrating that in his theology as well as Paul’s and the other New Testament authors, God is not just the Father generally but is the Abba Father of all believers that Jesus of Nazareth revealed.

In 1 Peter, God is referenced as both “The Father” (1:2) and “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” who by His mercy, has caused believers to be born again and receive eternal life through the death and resurrection of His Son” (1:3). Peter charges believers to “Call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds” (1:17). Significantly, the context is Peter’s moral imperative to holiness quoting the Old Testament that believers are to be holy in all their conduct, “Since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1:16). This is noteworthy for Peter beautifully and intricately weaves together God’s transcendence and imminence, His holiness and His tender paternal love just as the Lord Jesus did. For Peter, God is both incomprehensibly holy, demanding awe, reverence, holy fear, and respect, and at the same time, He is Father and is to be loved, trusted, and approached with the confidence that He will surely show mercy. This is the same theological approach to God as Holy and righteous Father that Jesus Himself demonstrated and taught. Finally, in 2 Peter, Peter recounts the story of God’s affirmation of His Son addressing referring to Him as “God the Father” (2:17).<sup>792</sup>

The book of Acts contains three references to God as Father, two on the lips of Jesus and one reiterating the language He used. In Acts 1:4, Christ urges disciples to wait for “The promise of the Father,” which picks up on a theme from Jesus’ prior discussion in Luke. In 1:7, concerning the establishment of the kingdom, Jesus addresses God in His quintessential way as “The Father.” Finally, in his sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2:33, Peter uses Jesus’ terminology

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<sup>792</sup> Bayes affirms that these texts each “Emphasize the Father as the personal God whom believers know and who loves them enough to exercise discipline when appropriate.” Bayes, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 30-31.

noting that Jesus has received “From the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit” and has poured it out on His people. Thus, Luke’s use of Father in Acts is directly tied to Jesus’ usage of Father language and in connection with the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, Paul saw a direct connection between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the believer’s cry of *αββα ὁ πατήρ* drawing on a significant theme from the ministry of Jesus (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

The letters with more references to God as Father and where this theme plays a more central role than any of the other New Testament literature are the Epistles of John. The centrality of God as Father in John’s Gospel and the Johannine literature was addressed in the previous chapter. Outside of His Gospel, there are still more references to God as Father in John’s three short letters than the whole Old Testament. The contribution of John’s theology of God as Father was summarized in three major points which are also descriptive of what is expressed in his epistles. First, John emphasizes and reveals Jesus’ unique relationship with God as His Abba Father as the unique Son of God. Second, John emphasizes more than any other Jesus’ invitation for His disciples to enter into the Trinitarian love of Father, Son, and Spirit and to join Him in addressing God as their Abba Father. John makes it clear that all of Jesus’ disciples are personally invited by Christ to experience the same kind of intimacy and access that He did and address God directly as their Abba Father. Believers are personally and passionately loved by God as their Abba Father and they are invited to respond to his love in and through prayer by addressing Him as their Abba Father, Finally, John’s Gospel and His epistles both express the revolutionary nature of Jesus’ personal example and His teaching concerning New Testament prayer brought about an unprecedented and unparalleled shift in the New Covenant and the New Testament for Christian prayer. These points will be briefly illustrated in John’s Epistle.

In 1 John, John opens by noting that eternal life ultimately comes from “The Father” and that the fellowship Jesus’ disciples enjoyed is available to all disciples with “The Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1:2-3). Chapter two contains eight separate appeals to God as Father. Jesus serves as the advocate between believers and “the Father” (2:1). Young believers are praised for knowing “the Father.” All believers are charged not to love the things of the world for if they do, “The love of the Father is not in him” (2:15) for these things come “Not from the Father but is from the world” (2:16). John ties salvific faith in Jesus with the Father claiming that the one denies Jesus Christ “denies the Father and the Son” (2:22) and that, “No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also” (2:22). Finally, believers are charged to respond to the message of the Gospel so that, just as in John 15, they “Too will abide in the Son and in the Father” (2:24).

In John 3:1, the apostle John has what Stott has labeled “An outburst of wonder,”<sup>793</sup> celebrating both the identity of the Father as well as His lavish love in adopting believers as his children,<sup>794</sup> “See what (ποταπός) kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” This text celebrates three of the central themes of this dissertation. God is revealed as Abba Father, believers are adopted into His family as sons and daughters, and the New Testament authors evidences unprecedented intimacy and access to God based upon the teaching of Jesus. One step even further and a point that has not been emphasized in this dissertation is the lavish and extravagant love of God for His children. Concerning John’s usage of ποταπός in the wonderful phrase, ἴδετε ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατὴρ ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν, Blaiklock translates ποταπὴν ἀγάπην as “What unearthly love” writing

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<sup>793</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 118.

<sup>794</sup> Bayes, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 31.

concerning the significance of this term,<sup>795</sup> “There could be no conceivable method or device whereby sinful human beings attain such a state or such a privilege save by the exercise of a power unimaginable in its strength and its unearthliness. It is all of love and grace.”<sup>796</sup> Thus, while affirming the major points of this study, John contributes an added depth to the reality of God the Father’s passionate, personal, and intimate love for His sons and daughters.

In 4:1, it is “The Father” who has “Sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” In 2 John, John together the identity of “God the Father” with his relationship to “Jesus Christ the Father’s Son” (3). In verse four of the letter, John refers to believers as children obeying the commands of “The Father.” Finally, in verse 9, John makes clear that God is the Father and that Jesus Christ is His Son. In Revelation, also authored by the Apostle John, God as Father appears five times. Interestingly, in every instance, God is referenced not as the Father of believers but rather as the Father of Jesus (1:6, 2:27, 3:5, 3:21). Thus, John’s epistles contain the same centrality of God as Father and believers as His children as His Gospel. However, in both John’s Gospel and the epistles, a central point that is also emphasized is the Father’s personal, passionate, and intimate love for His children. As the Father of Jesus and of believers, in John’s usage as well as the other New Testament authors, “The word ‘Father’ stresses, not merely the fact of God’s relationship with his only Son, but also the warmth of paternal affection which God feels for him, and, through him, for us as well.”<sup>797</sup>

Thus, believers are adopted into the family of God as His children and are granted unprecedented intimacy and access with Him as their Abba Father for He loves them and desires

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<sup>795</sup> Bayes, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 31.

<sup>796</sup> Edward Musgrave Blaiklock, *Letters to Children of Light* (Glendale: Regal, 1975), 58– 59.

<sup>797</sup> Bayes, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 31.

a relationship with them.<sup>798</sup> The centrality of God as Father in the New Testament affirmed by the unified witness of the historic church demonstrates how central and transformational this was in the life and ministry of Jesus.<sup>799</sup>

### **The Transformation of Christian Prayer Addressed to God as Abba Father**

The first primary conclusion of this dissertation that this chapter addressed and affirmed is that Jesus of Nazareth's use of Abba as a direct address for God in prayer was unprecedented and unparalleled against the religious background of His time and is transformational and foundational for the entire Christian religion. This has been discussed and confirmed and serves as the foundational concept for this second main conclusion. The second major finding of this dissertation which will be defended here is that New Testament prayer is categorically distinct when compared with its Old Testament and Jewish counterparts and the explanation is Jesus' use of  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  for God and His instruction for His disciples to do the same.<sup>800</sup> The heart of Christian prayer is the revelation of God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha \acute{\omicron} \pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  and believers' unprecedented intimacy and access with Him in and through Jesus Christ in the New Covenant.<sup>801</sup> The key feature that makes New Testament prayer distinct from the Old is believers' new and unparalleled ability to

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<sup>798</sup> Marshall highlights the depth of the Father's love expressed through His care for His children in answering their prayers, writing, The force of the term is to assure the disciples of God's loving care for them, so that they can ask him for gifts with the certainty of being heard." Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 456–457.

<sup>799</sup> Jude 1 contains a reference to God as Father in his introduction to his letter contributing to the overwhelming reality that every New Testament author appealed to the identity of God as Father in the New Testament,

<sup>800</sup> In one of the best and most detailed biblical theological treatments of prayer in the Bible, Millar confirms the thesis of this study that while developing an Old Testament theme and in continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus' teaching concerning prayer in the New Testament "transforms" prayer in theologically significant ways, Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016),

<sup>801</sup> Wright calls the Lord's Prayer, "The heart of the New Covenant charter," which at its center is the revelation of God as Abba Father, N.T. Wright, 'The Lord's Prayer as a Paradigm of Christian Prayer', in R. N. Longenecker & T. Clark. (ed.), *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 132–154.

approach God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ* just as Jesus did following both His example and His instruction.<sup>802</sup> Though the Fatherhood of God is a minor theme in the Old Testament, it is the primary means of addressing God in prayer in the New Testament and is the crux of the New Covenant. Thus, *αββα* is the hermeneutical key for interpreting Jesus' teaching on prayer in the New Testament and the heart of the Christian religion and everything that makes Christianity new.

*The Intimacy and Access of αββα ὁ πατήρ Made Available Through Adoption (νίοθεσίας)*

This dissertation has affirmed repeatedly that both Jesus' own practice in prayer and His instruction to His disciples were profoundly distinct and unprecedented and unexpected developments from Jewish prayer. The uninhibited access to God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ*, the shameless, passionate, bold, persistent, and patient prayer illustrated by Christ in the Lukan parables, and the confident assurance that anything believers ask will be granted as presented by John represent seismic shifts between prayer in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>803</sup> With copious background information and exegetical treatment of the text having been presented, the conclusion of this study concerning this point is that New Testament prayer has been radically revolutionized most profoundly and significantly by Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ*. There is nothing in the Old Testament that represents the intimacy, access, boldness, and confidence of New Testament prayer. Beyond prayer, Christians have an

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<sup>802</sup> For a study which explores and affirms this position that believers relate to God as Abba just like Jesus did, see, Paul Kenneth Moser, "Jesus and Abba in Gethsemane: A Center in Filial Cooperation." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 15, no. 1 (2021): 63–78.

<sup>803</sup> This topic will be addressed in the next section of this chapter and these statements will be defended and demonstrated from the biblical text.

unprecedented relationship with God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ* in and through the finished work of Jesus Christ the Son.<sup>804</sup> As Packer wrote so well,

You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. 'Father' is the Christian name for God.<sup>805</sup>

As this study has illustrated, there is ample biblical, historical, literary, and theological support for these claims. However, the question remains, what resulted in such a profound transformation of prayer in the New Covenant and how is it that believers have gained such an unprecedented and unparalleled privilege of intimacy and access to God as their *αββα ὁ πατήρ*? Outside of the Gospels, the two most central New Testament texts for understanding believer's relationship to God as His children and He as their *αββα ὁ πατήρ* are and 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. And serve the key to understanding this transformation of Christian prayer and the new covenant.

Jesus' teaching and unprecedented direct invitation in John 14-17 that believers could ask anything directly to the Father with the intimacy, access, boldness, and confidence of Christ as His children is explicated in detail through Paul's extensive revelation of the doctrine of adoption

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<sup>804</sup> Hill affirms this position and the perspective that Abba language employed by Jesus and given to His disciples emphasizes the believer's status as children of God, Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, 268, 273, 277.

<sup>805</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 201

in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6.<sup>806</sup> In both texts, Paul expounds upon and reveals what the Lord Jesus began to reveal in John 14-17; the adoption of believers as the children of God.

In both Pauline texts which employ *αββα ὁ πατήρ*, they also use the theologically loaded word *υιοθεσία*. Concerning a proper translation and rendering of this key term, Burke writes that “The expression *υιοθεσία* comprises two Greek words: *huios*, ‘son’, and *thesis*, ‘placing’, and etymologically denotes either the process or act of being placed or ‘adopted as son(s)’.”<sup>807</sup> In Romans, believers receive the *πνεῦμα υιοθεσίας*: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15 ESV). In Galatians, Paul writes that Christ came *ἵνα τὴν υιοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν*: “...So that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:5-6 ESV). In each of these texts, adoption is directly linked with believers' unprecedented intimacy and access to God most clearly and notably illustrated by the Spirit-empowered *κυ* (κράζω), *αββα ὁ πατήρ*! Therefore, adoption is the theological key disclosed by Paul which links Christ's finished work

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<sup>806</sup> Adoption in the New Testament and Paul's writings in particular is one of the most significant and primary New Testament themes. It is inextricably tied to this dissertation's emphasis on believer's intimacy and access to God opened through Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Father. An entire chapter could be devoted to the theme of adoption in the New Testament alone. The treatment here will be insufficiently brief and merely surface level.

For a variety of excellent works that treat this topic with extensive depth, see the following and especially the works by Burke and Garner: Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2006); David B. Garner, *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2016); Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Brenda B. Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010); Erin M. Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans: Contemporary Metaphor Theories and the Pauline Huiiothesia Metaphors* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Caroline E. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

<sup>807</sup> Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2006). Burke's understanding and definition of *υιοθεσία* is dependent upon J.M. Scott's work in: J.M. Scott, “Adoption as Sons of God: An Investigation into the Background of HUIIOTHESIA,” *WUNT* 52.48, (1992), Tübingen: Mohr.



at Calvary with its effect for all those who would receive the redemption that not only results in their justification but even more intimately, in their adoption as children of *αββα ὁ πατήρ*.<sup>808</sup>

The significance of adoption language in Paul is inextricably tied to this dissertation's emphasis on the believer's intimacy and access to God opened through Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Father illustrated most clearly by *αββα ὁ πατήρ*. Adoption in and through Christ is the explanation for the explosion of Father language in the New Testament and the unprecedented and unparalleled intimacy and access Christians have to God as their Father. In these Pauline texts, it is in the context of prayer, just as in the life and ministry of Jesus, that believers' unprecedented intimacy and access to God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ* is most evidently illustrated. As will soon be discussed, there is a striking parallel between Paul's instruction concerning prayer addressed to God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ* and the centrality of God as Father in His own prayers. It could be said of Paul as it was said of Jesus that his relationship with and revelation of God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ* serves not only as the hermeneutical to interpreting his teaching here concerning prayer but everything he teaches that makes the New Covenant distinctively new. For both Paul and Jesus, it is in the context of prayer that God is most clearly revealed as *αββα ὁ πατήρ*. As Thompson notes,

All Paul's references to God as 'our Father' are found in some sort of benediction or prayer. This pattern suggests that already by the time of the writing of the earliest Pauline epistle, 'our Father' had become a characterization of God in the Christian community, particularly in various sorts of prayer. This may suggest a direct link to the pattern of prayer that was apparently characteristic of both Jesus' practice and instruction. Both for Jesus and for Paul, the designation of God as Father was particularly appropriate in prayer.<sup>809</sup>

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<sup>808</sup> Girardeau highlights the superiority of adoption to justification in the New Testament noting that adoption is the intended goal of justification: "The Scriptures make a difference between [justification and adoption]. They treat adoption as something over and beyond justification... justification... introduces the... sinner into the society of (the) righteous... adoption... introduces the sinner into the society of God's family." J.L. Girardeau, *Discussions of theological Questions* (Harrisonburg: Sprinkle, 1986), 479.

<sup>809</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 120.

Thus, the New Testament revelation of believers' unparalleled intimacy and access to God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ* is inseparably tied with the radical development of New Testament prayer made possibly only through the work of Jesus made available to believers through adoption.

The centrality of God as Father and adoption language in the New Testament is a historically critical theme. For example, In his last will and testament, John Calvin highlighted the importance of adoption stating, “I have no other defence or refuge for salvation than His gratuitous adoption, on which my salvation depends.”<sup>810</sup> Calvin continued, “I trust to no other security for my salvation than this, and this only, viz. that as God is the Father of mercy, He will show Himself a Father to me, who acknowledge myself to be a miserable sinner.”<sup>811</sup> Calvin’s comments demonstrate the interrelation between Paul’s writings concerning believers as adopted into the family of God and the intimacy, access, and confidence that arises with the privilege of addressing God directly as *αββα ὁ πατήρ*.

In the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, in reply to the question “What is adoption?” the following answer is given:

Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.<sup>812</sup>

There are at least three major implications of the doctrine of adoption in relation to Paul’s presentation of God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ* in these texts. First, in Christ, believers are invited to address and relate to God directly as their Abba Father through adoption. The heart of Paul’s

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<sup>810</sup> Recorded in Philip Schaff, *Modern Christianity: The Swiss Reformation, History of the Christian Church* 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 829.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid.

<sup>812</sup> *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. 74. What is adoption?

presentation of adoption is the reality that it is only in and through Jesus Christ that believers can address God directly as their *αββα ὁ πατήρ* as no Jew had ever done before them.<sup>813</sup> It is no accident that the Spirit-empowered cry of *αββα ὁ πατήρ* is directly linked with adoption in both texts. The reason no Jew had ever dared approach in the manner of Jesus and subsequently his disciples is that this manner of intimacy and access to God was impossible apart from adoption. It is only in and through the finished work of Jesus that believers are adopted into the family of God and as His sons and daughters can confidently cry *αββα*. As Calvin so eloquently expounded,

Christ declares that we have this in common with himself, that he who is his God and Father is also our God and Father. . . . In other passages we learn that we are made partakers of all the blessings of Christ; but this is the foundation of the privilege, that he imparts to us the very fountain of blessings. It is, unquestionably, an invaluable blessing, that believers can safely and firmly believe, that he who is the God of Christ is their God, and that he who is the Father of Christ is their Father.”<sup>814</sup>

Thus, the explanation for the unprecedented approach to God in the early church is that in Christ, believers are invited to address and relate to God directly as their Abba Father through adoption.

Second, Paul’s use of *αββα ὁ πατήρ* and His instruction concerning adoption, prayer, sonship, and God as Father goes beyond a liturgical address employed by believers. Instead, it revolutionizes the Christian faith for in Christ, and through adoption, all believers are welcomed to experience the same intimacy and access with the Father that Jesus did. This is one of the

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<sup>813</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith* reflects the views presented above in *Westminster Larger Catechism* but with added detail. Concerning adoption, it states, “All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption: by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God; have His name put upon them; receive the Spirit of adoption; have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.” *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 12, Adoption.

<sup>814</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Vol. 2. 1553., Translated by William Pringle (CTS 18., 1847), 262.

primary explanations for the retention of this Aramaic term. Αββα signified for the New Testament church that they are not adopted as inferior or secondary sons of God, but rather, the scandal of the Gospel is that in Christ, believers are granted the unconceivable privilege of enjoying the same intimacy and access to God as Αββα as Jesus did.<sup>815</sup> Once again, Paul is laying a theological foundation for the truths contained in Jesus' Farewell Discourse in John 14-17 concerning believers' new relationship with God as their Abba Father. As Bayes writes,

Into this mutual love of Father and Son, believers are caught up. The possibility of coming to God as Father lies in Jesus (John 14:6). Those who do come are loved by the Father (John 14:21, 23; 16:27), such that Jesus can refer to the Father as "my Father and your Father" (John 20:17). There is a clear particularity about this love: it is specifically directed to those who belong to Christ... Jesus is stressing the wonderful fact that through faith in him we have been embraced by that very same Fatherhood which has been his portion eternally.<sup>816</sup>

The critical point that cannot be missed here is that believers do not only have access to God as Father, they are adopted and invited into the infinite and eternal triune love of the Father, Spirit, and Son, and are granted the very same access to God as Αββα as Jesus the Son modeled for them. Jesus' life and ministry then became the demonstration of what life as children of God as Father was meant to look like. Jesus established a pattern for the Christian life which His disciples were to follow. Cranfield highlights just how wonderfully good this news is that the Gospel welcomes all believers into the family of God and grants them unparalleled intimacy and access to God as their Father, "This fatherhood of God in relation to us is not at all natural or necessary. It is, rather, a matter of sheer grace, the stupendous grace of the eternal God, who adopts human beings as his sons and daughters for the sake of his own dear Son and gives them

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<sup>815</sup> Both Burke and Garner affirm this point in their book length treatments of adoption referenced above: Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*; Garner, *Sons in the Son*.

<sup>816</sup> Bayes, *The Apostles' Creed*, 30.

the right to call him ‘Father.’”<sup>817</sup> Every time believers uttered *αββα ὁ πατήρ*, they were reminded that they had been adopted into the family of God and could experience what no one in the Old Covenant ever could.

Adoption and the revelation of God as Father is not a periphery or marginal theme in the New Testament. Rather, as Packer affirmed, it is “The heart of the New Testament message.”<sup>818</sup> In Paul, the continuation of the *αββα ὁ πατήρ* in the life and prayers of the early church functioned as the fulfillment of one of the Old Testament’s most significant yet exclusive promises.<sup>819</sup> The climax of God’s covenant promises to His people expressed in His covenant with David was that to the Davidic and messianic heir, Yahweh declared that “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (2 Samuel 7:14). The centrality of adoption and sonship in and through Jesus Christ the Son is expressed vividly in the New Testament author’s interpretation and application of this text. In the letter to the Hebrews, the author interpreted this text as fulfilled in Christ expressing the unique divinity, deity, and distinctive relationship Jesus bore as the very Son of God. Paul, however, interprets this text that in and through Christ, all believers are the recipients of this covenant promise. In 2 Corinthians 6:18, concerning all believers as the temple of the living God, Paul quotes the Davidic promise applying it to all believers that in Christ, God the Father declares concerning all believers that, “I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18 ESV).

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<sup>817</sup> Charles E. B. Cranfield, *The Apostles’ Creed* (London: Continuum, 2004), 113.

<sup>818</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 203.

<sup>819</sup> Verbrugge, *Αββά*, 1.

It is difficult to emphasize sufficiently the weight of this reality that what was once the pinnacle of the Old Covenant has now become the inheritance of every son and daughter of the Father in and through Christ.<sup>820</sup> As Bayes highlights, “Believers have these privileges only in relationship with Jesus the Son, and for Paul, our ‘adoption to sonship’ is dependent on and derived from the sonship of the one with whom we are ‘co-heirs’ (Gal 4:4-5; cf. Rom. 7:17).”<sup>821</sup> *αββα ὁ πατήρ* is the reminder and declaration that in Christ, both Jew and Gentile can together boldly approach the covenant God of the Old Testament in an unprecedented and unparalleled manner in which no one in the old covenant ever dared to, not even the original Davidic recipients of this covenant promise.<sup>822</sup> Thus, the *αββα ὁ πατήρ* cry in Romans 8:15 and Galatians

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<sup>820</sup> There are various views concerning the nature of believers’ relation to the Father in and through Christ. As this study has done, some emphasize the continuity of believers’ relationship with the Father in and through Christ. Garner’s work is one example of this approach which emphasizes that one of the wonderful benefits of the Gospel is the astonishingly good news that believers have the same intimacy and access to God as Father that Jesus did; Garner, *Sons in the Son*.

A second approach is one which emphasizes more heavily the discontinuity and distinctiveness between Jesus’ relationship with the Father as the Son of God and believers as the children of God. For example, Billings writes, “Jesus is the only ‘natural’ child of God... All the rest of us need to be adopted.” J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 24. Another example of this is found in Burke’s study where he writes, “The death of the eternal and unique Son of God is the means by which believers are adopted by God into his family and Paul is well aware of the distinction between Jesus’ sonship and the adoptive sonship of believers.” Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 96. Finally, Garner references the German Reformer Philipp Melancthon who insisted that adoption differentiates the redeemed from the Redeemer: ‘The fact that he calls them adopted sons distinguishes the other saints from Christ, and this distinction must be held fast in order that we may know that Christ is the Son of God by nature, both equal with the Father and of the same essence, as it is written: ‘We beheld his glory, like the glory of the only-begotten of the Father.’ [John 1:14] But the saints are sons by adoption, because they have been received of Christ, and have been given the gifts of Christ, namely the Spirit, and new life, wisdom and righteousness, etc.’ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 20.

This is a significant theological and interpretive issue which deserves much more detailed treatment than this project can address. However, this study affirms the first interpretation that emphasizes the continuity in believers’ relationship with the Father in Christ receiving the same intimacy and access while also incorporating the perspectives of the other view as well that the biblical authors were careful to separate the distinct identity and nature of Jesus’ sonship with that of those adopted in and through His work.

<sup>821</sup> Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 222.

<sup>822</sup> Concerning these texts in their original Jewish context of the first-century Christians, Fredriksen notes, “Exhorting and encouraging the spirit-filled ex-pagan pagans of the Roman assembly, Paul pointed ahead to their fast-approaching final redemption. God has adopted them as his sons. They now—intimately—could call God by his Jewish name, ‘Abba.’ As God’s newly adopted sons, they too, along with Israel, could—and soon would—

4:6 is the most significant Pauline and New Testament text in emphasizing that “The believer is caught up into the same intimate closeness with the Father enjoyed by the Son of God himself.”<sup>823</sup>

Third and finally, Christian prayer and the Christian religion itself are transformed by the revelation of God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ*.<sup>824</sup> In the next section, the distinctive nature of New Testament prayer will be addressed when compared to its Old Testament counterpart. However, Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father has significant theological ramifications far beyond the topic of prayer. Rather, it represents a profound and distinctive transformation of the Christian religion and every aspect of Christian theology. The entire New Testament is written in the context of God as Father in a manner congruent yet unprecedented and unexpected from the Old Testament. The historic unified witness of the church also attests to the transformational nature of Jesus’ relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. For example, as was previously stated, the thirteen historic councils of the church all testify to the centrality of God as Father. Not only do they affirm what has been presented in this study, but they demonstrate that the unprecedented and unparalleled approach to God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ* has become the primary means of addressing God by all Christians from the New Testament era and beyond.

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inherit the Kingdom.” Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2018), 134.

<sup>823</sup> Bayes, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 31.

<sup>824</sup> This was certainly true when Christianity is compared with its religious neighbors as Guthrie points out, “Whereas the contemporary pagan world held its gods in fear, the Christian view of God’s fatherhood brings an unparalleled element of intimacy into man’s relation with God.” Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), 80-81. However, the point being made here is that Christ’s approach to God and prayer was categorically distinct when compared to the Jewish one.

For example, the *Heidelberg Catechism* illustrates that historic Christianity affirms God as Father, the individual sonship of believers, and their unprecedented intimacy and access with Him represented most clearly through prayer,

That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ the Son. I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world. God is able to do this because he is almighty God and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.<sup>825</sup>

This is only one example among countless that could be provided. While outside the primary scope of this dissertation, the point has been made sufficiently that Christian prayer and the Christian religion itself are transformed by the revelation of God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ*.<sup>826</sup>

*The Transformational Nature of Prayer in the Old and New Testaments in Relation to God as Father (αββα ὁ πατήρ)*

The final point to be illustrated in this study is the transformational nature of prayer in the Old and New Testaments in relation to God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ*. The subject of prayer in the Old and New Testaments and specifically the continuity and discontinuity between them is an extensive topic that deserves its own treatment far beyond what this study can offer.<sup>827</sup> The primary point this dissertation seeks to prove based upon the research presented is that the key feature that makes New Testament prayer distinct from the Old is believers' new and

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<sup>825</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*, A 26.

<sup>826</sup> As this section has shown, adoption is a central New Testament theme which ties the finished work of Christ to believer's newfound access to God as their Abba Father. While significant, this is not the primary theme of this dissertation and thus this brief treatment will have to suffice. A list of works was cited above pointing the reader to a number of insightful, detailed, and thorough treatments of the topic in a manner outside the scope of this project.

<sup>827</sup> For excellent and detailed works which provide extensive treatments of both Old and New Testament prayer together and the continuity between them as well as their distinctives, see the following: Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016); Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Wayne R. Spear, *Talking to God: The Theology of Prayer* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2002); Herbert Lockyer, *All the Prayers of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1959).



unparalleled ability to approach God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha \acute{o} \pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  just as Jesus did following both His example and His instruction. That is, the heart of Christian prayer and what makes it radically new is the revelation of God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha \acute{o} \pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  and believers' unprecedented intimacy and access with Him in and through Jesus Christ in the new covenant.

### **Prayer in the Old Testament in Relation to God as Father**

Prayer is certainly a significant topic in the Old Testament.<sup>828</sup> The Old Testament establishes the primary background for prayer in the New Testament and it is within the Jewish context and framework that Jesus and His disciples lived. While this study has focused primarily on those elements that mark New Testament prayer as distinctively new, this is not to say that there is not a great deal of continuity between the two Testaments. Rather, in many ways, New Testament prayer is only the development and continuation of this Old Testament theme.

For example, while very limited, the Old Testament is the foundational source for the New Testament's presentation of God as Father and prayer addressed to Him as such. As Thompson notes, "It is because God is first the Father of his people Israel that we speak of God as Father and as the Father of Israel's Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Through and in Jesus, Christians confess God as Father and so confess their place within the people created by God's redemptive love."<sup>829</sup> Second, the Old Testament bears witness to the fact that Yahweh hears the

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<sup>828</sup> For a list of works which treat the topic of prayer specifically in the Old Testament, see: Walter C. Kaiser, *I Will Lift My Eyes Unto the Hills: Learning from the Great Prayers of the Old Testament* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2018); Brueggemann, Walter. *Great Prayers of the Old Testament*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008; Idem., *Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005); Michael E. W. Thompson, *I Have Heard Your Prayer: The Old Testament and Prayer* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012); Michael Widmer, *Standing in the Breach: An Old Testament Theology and Spirituality of Intercessory Prayer* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015); Clarence Edward Noble Macartney, *Wrestlers with God: Prayers of the Old Testament* (New York: R.R. Smith, inc., 1930).

<sup>829</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 40.

cries of his people and delights to answer them.<sup>830</sup> Thus, the Old Testament prepared the Jewish people for Jesus' significant and unprecedented development of these themes that God is not merely the Father of Israel but each believer's  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  and that New Testament prayer is marked with both an intimacy and access and confidence, boldness, and assurance that no one in the Old Testament had ever experienced.<sup>831</sup>

Therefore, while there is a great deal of continuity between the two Testaments, Jesus of Nazareth brought about unprecedented transformation of prayer through His relationship with and revelation of God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  Father.<sup>832</sup> As Delitzsch notes: "No saint of the Old Testament, in whatever degree he might stand of preparatory or prevenient grace, could...draw nigh to God so confidently, so joyously, so familiarly, as we can now."<sup>833</sup> It is only in and through the finished work of Jesus that believers are adopted into the family of God and given the privilege of Christian prayer as sons and daughters as evidenced by the intimacy, access, confidence, boldness, and assurance of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

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<sup>830</sup> Both Millar and Miller explore this topic in detail and affirm this: Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*; Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*.

<sup>831</sup> Riches highlights the continuity of Jesus' development of the Old Testament theme of God as Father. He writes, "Jesus' usage of Father for God is consonant with the image of God as Father in the scripture. Jesus used the term Father not in spite of or because of its absence from the Old Testament but because of its presence in the texts that he knew and read as scripture." John Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 149–50. This is a significant point that must be remembered even though the primary argument of this study has been the unprecedented development of this theme in the life and ministry of Jesus.

<sup>832</sup> For an example of a perspective of someone who sees much more continuity rather than discontinuity between Jesus' use of father for God against the Old Testament background, see Childs, "Jesus brought no new concept of God, but he demonstrated in action the full extent of God's redemptive will for the world which was from the beginning." - Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 358.

<sup>833</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Pub. Co., 1952).

## Prayer in the New Testament in Relation to God as Father

While prayer is an important element of Old Testament theology and there are the beginning developments of a theology of God as Father, nothing compares to Jesus' of Nazareth's relationship with and revelation of God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  and His invitation for all of His disciples to experience the same.<sup>834</sup> This entire dissertation has sought to explore Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$   $\acute{\omicron}$   $\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  and believers' unprecedented intimacy and access with Him in and through Jesus Christ in the New Covenant. This is the heart of Christian prayer and what makes it radically new and distinct from the Old. Christ has given His followers the unparalleled ability to approach God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$   $\acute{\omicron}$   $\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  just as He did, following both His example and His instruction concerning prayer.<sup>835</sup> As Bockmuehl noted, "The single most important expression of both participation in Christ and imitation of Christ was prayer"<sup>836</sup>

While many elements of New Testament prayer could be highlighted which represent profound and distinctive development and transformation between prayer in the Old and New Testaments, three specifically will be highlighted. The first of these is believers' uninhibited access to God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$   $\acute{\omicron}$   $\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  representing unprecedented intimacy and access to God. Jesus'

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<sup>834</sup> Again, a biblical theological presentation of prayer in the New Testament is a significant topic which deserves far more attention of its own. For excellent works which do just that in great detail in addition to the whole biblical theologies listed above, see the following: Richard N. Longenecker, *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co, 2001); David Crump, *Knocking on Heavens' Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); David M. Crump, *Jesus the Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts* (Mohr: Siebeck, 2019); Mark Jones, *The Prayers of Jesus: Listening to and Learning from Our Savior* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019); Stephen H., Shoemaker, *Finding Jesus in His Prayers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

<sup>835</sup> Spear makes the insightful comment that there is very little didactic teaching in the Old Testament compared to Christ's teaching on the topic, "It is interesting to find, however, that there is a relatively small amount of explicit teaching about prayer in that part of the Bible." Wayne R. Spear, *Talking to God: The Theology of Prayer* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2002), 13.

<sup>836</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, 'Early Christian prayer and identity formation: Introducing the project', in *Early Christian prayer and identity formation, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 336*, 1–12, R. Hvalvik and K.O. Sandnes, eds. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 126.

personal example and His teaching to His disciples to address God in this manner represents the most significant development in New Testament prayer. Thompson affirms this claim showing its significance from Christ's teaching, Paul's continuation of it in the early church, and its fulfillment of a central Old Testament promise:

When Jesus gave his disciples the Lord's Prayer, he gave them authority to follow him in addressing God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  and so granted them a share in his status as Son (cf. Jn. 1:12). Accordingly, Paul sees in the invocation 'Abba' clear evidence of our adoption as sons through Christ and of the eschatological possession of the Spirit (Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:4–7). The fact that the church, like Jesus, may say 'Abba' is a fulfillment of God's promise: 'I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters' (2 Cor. 6:18; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; also Jub. 1:24–25).<sup>837</sup>

Jesus of Nazareth's relationship with and revelation of God as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha \acute{o} \pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  is one of the most transformational and central elements of His life and ministry. When He lifted His eyes to Heaven and taught His disciples to pray, one word radically altered the course of human history perhaps more than any other;  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$ . As Pannenberg wrote, "On the lips of Jesus 'Father' became a proper name for God. It embraces every feature in the understanding of God which comes to light in the message of Jesus."<sup>838</sup>

Paul's employment of the bilingual phrase,  $A\beta\beta\alpha \acute{o} \Pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 demonstrates the lasting relevance of Jesus' example and teaching as well as the adoption of addressing God as  $A\beta\beta\alpha \acute{o} \Pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  by the early church even outside of Palestine.<sup>839</sup> Marshall refers to  $A\beta\beta\alpha$  as a "Treasured as a word spoken by Jesus" and confirms that, "The early church knew it was able to address God in this way because Jesus had invited his disciples to pray

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<sup>837</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "Αββά," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Abridged Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 1.

<sup>838</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 262.

<sup>839</sup> Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology*, 394–416.

thus.”<sup>840</sup> One of the primary areas this is illustrated is in the prayers of the New Testament and especially of the Apostle Paul which place God as Father at the heart of their theology of prayer.<sup>841</sup> It is impossible to separate the New Testament author’s prayers addressed directly to God as Father from the transformation of Jesus of Nazareth’s unprecedented theology and approach to prayer addressed to God as Father.<sup>842</sup> Just as the theology of the New Testament is steeped with Father, so too are the prayers. In the apostolic prayers of the New Testament, the most prominent and primary means of addressing, understanding, and approaching God is that of Father. As Pink writes, “Although there is not uniformity of expression but rather appropriate variety in this matter, yet the most frequent manner in which the Deity is addressed therein is as Father.”<sup>843</sup>

Perhaps the clearest demonstration of the apostolic approach to prayer following both the personal example and teaching of Jesus is Paul’s approach to prayer, “For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father...” (Ephesians 3:14). Even just a brief survey of the Apostle Paul’s prayers represents the unprecedented transformation and development of prayer between the two Testaments and covenants in the explosion of Father language for God. Paul’s prayers

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<sup>840</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Leicester: IVP, 1976), 59.

<sup>841</sup> The topic of the Pauline prayers is a significant one which deserves much fuller treatment than this study can give. For a few works which do this well, see the following: D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Arthur W. Pink, *The Ability of God: Prayers of the Apostle Paul* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2000); Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul’s Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of St Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Prayers of St. Paul* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1914).

<sup>842</sup> For a few works which discuss early Christianity and their core beliefs, see: N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2019); Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine Through the Apostles’ Creed* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016); Stanley D. Gale, *The Christian’s Creed* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018).

<sup>843</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Ability of God: Prayers of the Apostle Paul* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2000), 13.

throughout His letters are offered to, “God our Father” (Galatians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:16), “the Father” (Ephesians 3:14; Colossians 1:12), “the Father of mercies” (2 Corinthians 1:3), “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:6; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3), “the Father of glory” (Ephesians 1:17), “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:14), “our God and Father” (1 Thessalonians 3:11, 13). Thus, to quote Pink once more, “In this, we may see how the apostles had heeded the injunction of their Master, for when they requested Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray,’ He responded thus: ‘When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven’ (Luke 11:1–2).”<sup>844</sup>

Finally, it is not merely that prayer in the rest of the New Testament is offered to God as Father evidences serious transformation and unprecedented development, but that each of the distinctive marks of New Testament prayer discussed here is evidenced by the New Testament authors. Again, Paul is the primary example of this demonstrating great intimacy and access to God in His prayers. Paul prays with boldness, confidence, passion, and perseverance throughout all of his letters in a manner characteristic of Christ Himself.<sup>845</sup> Not only this, but Paul continues instructing the church to follow the example of Christ in praying directly to God as Ἀββὰ ὁ Πατήρ as a reminder of the intimacy and access Christians have in and through Jesus adopted into the family of God as his beloved children.<sup>846</sup>

A second transformational development of prayer between the two Testaments is Christ’s call to shameless, passionate, bold, persistent, and patient prayer illustrated by His in the Lukan parables. Christian prayer is remarkably bold and confident in a manner that again has significant

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<sup>844</sup> Pink, *The Ability of God*, 13.

<sup>845</sup> For further treatment of this, see: D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

<sup>846</sup> Verbrugge, *Ἀββὰ*, 1; Kittel, *Ἀββᾶ*.

Old Testament background, and is transformed by the context of prayer from sons and daughters addressed to God as *αββα ὁ πατήρ*. This kind of prayer is impossible apart from the finished work of Jesus and the subsequent adoption of believers into the family of God. Jesus did not teach the universal Fatherhood of God for believers and non-believers. Rather, God is the *αββα* Father of those who are adopted into the family in and through Jesus Christ His Son. That is, “Far from being a title that all people may use for God, the Gospels teach that only the believer has the right and privilege to address God in this manner.<sup>847</sup> Thus, Jesus invites His followers to pray with the confidence and boldness of sons and daughters in an unparalleled nature based upon the generous, loving, kind, and gracious nature of their *αββα* Father.

Finally, as sons and daughters adopted into the family of God, New Testament prayer is marked by the confident assurance that anything believers ask will be granted by the Father when they approach Him in and through Jesus the Son. Thus, believers experience the assurance of Jesus Christ the Son of God in prayer with the promise that their *Abba* Father in Heaven surely will hear and answer them. As M’Clintock and Strong so eloquently note,

Through faith in Christ all true Christians pass into the relation of sons; are permitted to address God with filial confidence in prayer; and to regard themselves as heirs of the heavenly inheritance. This adoption into the family of God inseparably follows our justification; and the power to call God our Father, in this special and appropriative sense, results from the inward testimony of our forgiveness given by the Holy Spirit.<sup>848</sup>

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<sup>847</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 340. Stein prefaces this statement with, “In all the more than 165 examples found in the Gospels, Jesus is always engaged in teaching the disciples, except in Matt 23:9, where Jesus is teaching both the disciples and the multitudes. The use of this title as an address for God was thus reserved by Jesus exclusively for himself and for his followers.”

<sup>848</sup> John M’Clintock and James Strong, “*Ab’ba*,” *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1880), 5.

The identity of believers as Sons and daughters of God the Father and the privilege of calling upon Him as  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$   $\acute{\omicron}$   $\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  comes with great benefits.<sup>849</sup> Christ has opened up unprecedented access and intimacy to God the Father and in Him through adoption, believers enjoy the same fellowship and communion with the Father as well as the same confident assurance of answered prayer. Believers ask in Jesus' name and by doing so, possess the same authority in prayer that Jesus Himself did. That is, "Christian prayer is possible only insofar as Jesus has revealed the Father, and then mediated our salvation by the strength of his own prayer-life."<sup>850</sup> Christians not only heed the teachings of Jesus in praying directly to God as Father but they follow His example and experience unbelievable joy that whatever they ask for, seek, or knock on the Father's door to obtain, it will be given to them for the Father Himself loves and cares for them for they are His sons and daughters and He is their  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$ .

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<sup>849</sup> Athanasius beautifully emphasizes the fact that it is Jesus the Son of God who most accurately and clearly reveals the Father. He writes, "It is more pious and more accurate to signify God from the Son and call Him Father, than to name Him from His works only and call Him Unoriginate." Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 1.34)

<sup>850</sup> David M. Crump, *Jesus the Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts* (Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 9.



## **Chapter 8: The Impact and Applications of a New Testament Theology of God as Father (*Abba*) in Relation to Prayer for Individual Believers, Theology, and the Contemporary Church (Theological Applications)**

### **Introduction and Summary**

P. T. Forsyth once famously said concerning the daunting task of writing on the topic of prayer,

It is a difficult and formidable thing to write on prayer, and one fears to touch the Ark. Perhaps no one ought to undertake it unless he has spent more toil in the practice of prayer than on its principle. But perhaps also the effort to look into its principle may be graciously regarded by him who ever liveth to make intercession as itself a prayer to know better how to pray.<sup>851</sup>

If this is true of prayer, it has certainly been the case in this dissertation attempting to address the intimate, eternal, and divine relationship between God the Father and His Son and Jesus' relationship with and revelation of His Abba Father to His disciples. The thesis that this dissertation has sought to explore is that the hermeneutical key to the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning prayer is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. That is, that Christian prayer is categorically distinct from Old Testament or Jewish Prayer because disciples of Christ are invited to approach God in an unprecedented manner as their Abba Father just as the Lord Jesus did transforming the entirety of the Christian religion.

It has been demonstrated repeatedly that the intimacy and access of Jesus' personal address of God as His Abba Father in prayer was unprecedented and unparalleled when compared with the ANE, Old Testament, and Second Temple Jewish literature. In addition to this, Jesus' teaching and instruction for His disciples to approach God as their Abba Father with the same intimacy and access that He did represents not merely a new approach to prayer, but an intrinsic shift and essential transformation of Christian prayer and the manner Christ's disciples

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<sup>851</sup> Peter Taylor Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer* (United Kingdom: Regent College Publishing, 1951), 9.

approach their Abba Father as His sons and daughters. This point was further affirmed by the explosion of Father language for God in the New Testament and the supremacy of God as Abba Father in the writings, prayer, and theology of the New Testament authors. Finally, the early church's continued use of Αββα ὁ Πατήρ and the historic and unified witness of the church through all generations that God is Father and is to be understood and related to as such affirms the centrality and transformational nature of Jesus' personal example and teaching concerning God as Αββα Father.

Thus, it has been argued that the theological and hermeneutical key to understanding Jesus' teaching concerning prayer and to understanding what makes the New Covenant definitively new is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father illustrated most clearly in His personal prayers and His teaching on prayer to His disciples. In the previous chapter, the theological implications of these claims were explored. Three major conclusions were presented based on the research and findings of this study.

First, it was affirmed and defended that Jesus of Nazareth's use of Abba as a direct address for God in prayer was unprecedented and unparalleled against the religious background of His time and is transformational and foundational for the entire Christian religion. Second, New Testament prayer is categorically distinct when compared with its Old Testament and Jewish counterparts and the explanation is Jesus' use of Abba for God and His instruction for His disciples to do the same. Finally, Jesus' teaching concerning God as Abba is an invitation to His disciples into the heart of Trinitarian love to enjoy the same intimacy and access with Abba that He did. This means that all Christians have unprecedented and unparalleled access to God as His sons and daughters most clearly displayed in the extraordinary privilege and gift of Christian prayer in Jesus' name, empowered by the Holy Spirit, addressed to Abba Father.

The previous chapter provides a detailed and lengthy discussion of the theological implications of these findings. The goal of this chapter is to offer a final synopsis of the research, findings, and major claims of this study and then to present practical applications. If this project only makes theoretical conclusions that have no practical application for individual believers and the local church, it has fallen short of its intended aim. Rather, though much of the research has been academic in nature, the applications are also pastoral, personal, and transformational.

### **Synopsis**

A brief synopsis of the research in the previous seven chapters will be provided to present a succinct summary of what has been treated in this research project. To begin, chapter one opened with a presentation of this dissertation's topic, thesis statement, and presented the need and rationale for the research. Next, the research methodology of this study was presented as a combination of historical-grammatical exegesis and biblical theology. Or, as Biblical Theological Historical-Grammatical Exegesis. The combined approach of these two theological disciplines was the approach employed by this project. Finally, a literature review of the most important authors and works on the topic was performed. The most significant scholar surveyed whose views were tested throughout this study was Joachim Jeremias. Two quotes represent the heart of Jeremias' research and the position this study explored and defended:

In the literature of Palestinian Judaism, *no evidence has yet been found* of 'my Father' being used by an individual as an address to God. . . . It is quite unusual that Jesus should have addressed God as 'my Father'; it is even more so that he should have used the Aramaic form *Abba*. . . . We do not have a single example of God being addressed as *Abba* in Judaism, but Jesus *always* addressed God in this way in his prayers.<sup>852</sup>

The complete novelty and uniqueness of *Abba* as an address to God in the prayers of Jesus shows that it expresses the heart of Jesus' relationship to God. He spoke to God as a

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<sup>852</sup> Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57; Also, Idem., *New Testament Theology*, 65–66.

child to its father: confidently and securely, and yet at the same time reverently and obediently.<sup>853</sup>

After surveying the other pertinent literature and all of the subsequent material throughout the study, the same conclusion was drawn concerning Jeremias as Szymik, that, “Conclusively, it should be stated that Jeremias’s study remains valid in its basic theses. ‘Abba, Father,’ the cry of the historical Jesus, was a brief and, at the same time, fullest expression of his filial relationship with the Father.”<sup>854</sup>

Chapters two, three, and four each attempted to establish a significant historical, literary, and theological background for Jesus’ use of Abba Father as a direct address for Yahweh. The aim of chapter two was to examine the relevant Ancient Near Eastern and Israelite historical and cultural material to form a cultural and theological background to God as Father in this context. What was discovered is that nothing in the ANE compared to Jesus’ understanding of or approach to God as Father. Even the few Old Testament references to God as Father were unique when compared with their religious neighbors. Concerning the Israelite conception of Father, the biblical presentation of what fatherhood ought to be is helpful in formulating the imagery to which Yahweh appealed in revealing Himself as Father. However, as chapter three demonstrated, nothing compares to the revelation of God as Abba Father in the ministry of Jesus.

Chapter three surveyed each of the fifteen references to God as Father in the Old Testament. Each text was treated uniquely within its own historical, literary, and theological environment. The findings were that though the Fatherhood of God is present within the Old Testament, it is “Not as common in the Old Testament as might be assumed.”<sup>855</sup> Second, the

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<sup>853</sup> Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 62–63; Also, Idem., *New Testament Theology*, 67, 68.

<sup>854</sup> Szymik, *Jesus’ Intitulation of God as Abba*, 498-499.

<sup>855</sup> Fazel Ebrihiam Freeks, “The Locus of Scripture in the Formulation of Fatherhood in the Old Testament: Exploratory and Reflective Discussions,” *Pharos Journal of Theology*, Volume 101 - (2020), 3.

conception of God as Father in the Old Testament was reserved for Israel as the corporate people of God and together being “children of Yahweh.” As Jeremias argued and as illustrated in the survey of every Old Testament text referencing God as Father, no one ever addressed Yahweh directly as Father, understood themselves individually as His child, or expressed the kind of intimacy or access to God as Jesus did in his employment of Abba Father. Jeremias’ assertion was confirmed by the exegetical analysis of the Old Testament that, “There is yet no evidence in the literature of ancient Palestinian Judaism that ‘my Father’ is used as a personal address to God.”<sup>856</sup>

In chapter four, the same approach was employed as in the previous two chapters in relation to all of the relevant Second Temple Jewish literature. While there are a few relevant texts and prayers that contain Father language for God, none of the texts addressed from the Old Testament or Second Temple period ever address Yahweh using Abba or in the same manner as Jesus in the Gospels.<sup>857</sup> Based upon the background material surveyed in the ANE, the Old

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<sup>856</sup> Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 29.

<sup>857</sup> Dunn confirms Jeremias’ claims along with many others, concluding that “‘Abba’ was a surprising word to use in addressing God. In its natural usage it was a family word and usually confined to the family circle... It was a word resonant with family intimacy... The point is that to address God in such a colloquial way, with such intimacy, is hardly known in the Judaism of Jesus’ time... What others thought too intimate in praying to God, Jesus used because of its intimacy.” James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 48.

Caird too affirms these conclusions, writing, “The further back we go [in the tradition], the more we discover the intense conviction of Jesus that God is his Father and he is His son. This is supported by the word *abba*, an address used at times by children to their father, indicating an intimacy and directness not contained in the more formal *abinu* [‘our father’]. Certainly other Jews believed in the fatherhood of God, but this was a creedal affirmation. . . . The synoptic passages speak of an intimacy of filial relationship . . . For Jesus the fatherhood of God has become a profoundly personal religious experience, long before it became a doctrine to be communicated to others.” G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 400-401.

Fitzmyer adds his support to these views, “There is no evidence in the literature of pre-Christian or first-century Judaism that ‘abba’ was used in any sense as a personal address for God by an individual.” Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Abba and Jesus’ Relation to God* (Paris: éditions du Cerf, 1985), 28.

Even James Barr, one of Jeremias’ most outspoken critics affirmed the possibility of his argumentation. In his words, “It may also be quite true that the use of *abba* was original with Jesus and historically genuine: I have no wish to dispute this...” James Barr, “‘Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy.’” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (1988): 39.

Testament, and Second Temple Judaism, it was concluded that the Jews did not ever understand themselves individually as sons and daughters of Yahweh, rarely if ever addressed Him as Father, and never as Abba. Thus, they didn't experience the intimacy, access, boldness, confidence or assurance in prayer that would become customary in the New Testament. Therefore, as Jeremias concluded, against this extensive background material it can be concluded,

We can see from all this why God is not addressed as Abba in Jewish prayers: to the Jewish mind it would have been disrespectful and therefore inconceivable to address God with this familiar word. For Jesus to venture to take this step was something new and unheard of. He spoke to God like a child to its father, simply, inwardly, confidently, Jesus' use of abba in addressing God reveals the heart of his relationship with God.<sup>858</sup>

Progressing from the background material, in chapter five, Jesus of Nazareth's unprecedented and unparalleled employment of the intimate and familial Aramaic Abba as a direct reference for Yahweh was investigated. Here, based upon an extensive linguistic, cultural, and historical examination of the Aramaic term Abba, it was concluded that when Jesus of Nazareth addressed Yahweh intimately, personally, and directly as Abba Father and instructed His followers to do the same, the Jewish understanding of Yahweh as covenant Father of Israel experienced an unprecedented and unexpected development.<sup>859</sup> Jesus is the first person ever recorded as understanding themselves individually as a child of God, employing the intimate and familial Aramaic Abba as a direct address for God, and by teaching His disciples to do the same, He

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<sup>858</sup> Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 62–63

<sup>859</sup> James D. G. Dunn supports this claim, writing, "Somewhat surprisingly, in scholarly circles there is a widespread agreement that Jesus probably did indeed see himself as God's son, or understood himself in relation to God as son. In terms of historical critical analysis the point is most securely based on the tradition of Jesus' prayer to God using the Aramaic form of address, 'Abba.'" James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 170; idem, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 21

transformed the Jewish approach to Yahweh and radically altered the future of Christianity with one word; Abba.

In chapter six, these claims were tested against the four Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Around one hundred and seventy times the word Father appears on the lips of Jesus in reference to God.<sup>860</sup> In this chapter, each of the most significant texts was addressed in a biblical theological manner with special attention given to Jesus' unprecedented example in His personal prayers as well as His transformational teaching to His disciples concerning the nature of prayer in the New Covenant.<sup>861</sup> What was proven undeniably is that God as Father stands at the heart of Jesus' life and prayers and is one of if not the most central themes of His ministry. Based on this material, it is confirmed that the hermeneutical key to the teaching of Jesus concerning prayer is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father most clearly displayed in His unprecedented approach to prayer.

Finally, in chapter seven, the remainder of the New Testament material was addressed with special attention given to the apostle Paul and the central texts where Paul uses the bilingual Greek and Aramaic phrase Αββα ὁ Πατήρ (Romans 8:15 and Galatians).<sup>862</sup> The explosion of Father language for God and the centrality of God as Father in the theology of the New Testament and its authors affirms the transformational nature of Jesus' use of Αββα in His own prayers and teaching. This approach was unprecedented and unparalleled against the religious background of His time and is transformational and foundational for the entire Christian religion.

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<sup>860</sup> Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), 140.

<sup>861</sup> G. B. Caird affirms the validity and centrality of Jesus' employment of Abba father as a direct address for God in prayer, writing, "Another certain fact about Jesus is his use of the word 'father,' attested by the Aramaic word abba in the records. The prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36) ('Abba, Father...') is on all hands recognized as an authentic word of Jesus." G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 398.

<sup>862</sup> Caulley, *The Place of Abba in Mark's Christology*, 394–416.

This resulted in profound and categorical developments in New Testament prayer and the manner in which Christ's disciples can approach him as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ.

### **Practical Application**

It is now time to heed the Apostle James' teaching and not merely be "hearers" of the Word but to be "doers" of it (James 1:22-25). There are three specific spheres this dissertation will focus on for applications. These are the academy or theological study in general, the local church and especially ministers, and individual believers. The three primary findings of this study and the unique contribution this dissertation seeks to make are the following:

- I. Jesus' use of Abba was unprecedented and transformational of the entire Christian religion.
- II. New Testament prayer is categorically distinct when compared with its Old Testament counterpart and the explanation is Jesus' use of Abba.
- III. Jesus' teaching is an invitation into the heart of Trinitarian love to enjoy the same intimacy and access with Abba that He did as Abba's sons and daughters in His name empowered by the Holy Spirit

The potential points of application based on this study's findings are legion. The topics of the Fatherhood of God, prayer, adoption, Abba, and the wide array of linguistic, historical, and theological issues addressed can be applied in a multiplicity of ways. Here, while each finding could be uniquely applied to the three spheres mentioned above, for the sake of clarity and brevity, one of these points of application will be offered for each individual sphere.

#### *The Academy or Theological Study in General*

In the famous article among New Testament scholars *The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology*, Nils Dahl made the shocking assertion that within theological studies, there is a significant neglected factor. That neglected factor is "God" Himself.<sup>863</sup> This is a surprising assertion for as this study has explored, while many aspects of the New Testament have been

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<sup>863</sup> Nils Dahl, "The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology," *Reflections* 75 (1975): 5-8.



challenged in the recent decades by modern and critical scholars, the authenticity of Jesus of Nazareth's claims concerning God as His Abba Father are nearly universally affirmed.<sup>864</sup> As Hamerton-Kelly noted, "Although not without its critics, the thesis that the Abba experience of Jesus is the starting point of Christology, and the key to Jesus' eschatology, commands widespread support. Catholic and Protestant exegetes are united in this conviction. It has become one of the assured results of modern scholars."<sup>865</sup> This is astounding for the central message of Jesus that God is His and believers' Father and can be approached with the intimacy and access of the Son of God as Abba Father truly is neglected within the academy and theology in general.

One of the primary findings of this study is that Jesus' use of Abba for God was unprecedented and transformational of the entire Christian religion. Since this is the case, the first primary point of application is that theological treatments of the New Testament must return to the centrality of Jesus' Father whom He knew and introduced as Abba. For example, as Eerden points out, while Christology dominates the theological landscape of New Testament studies and systematic theologies, it is rare if not impossible to find a systematic presentation of God himself as Father or Patrology proper anywhere.<sup>866</sup> In many respects, modern approaches to

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<sup>864</sup> Cobb affirms this claim and the centrality of Jesus' declaration of the Fatherhood of God best understood through his employment of Abba; "The basic argument of this book is that, although many ideas associated with God and Christian faith have been disproved, Jesus' teaching about Abba has not. On the contrary, it is coherent with our experience and responds well to the needs of the world in our day. It can be tested against personal experience. I commend it enthusiastically." John B. Cobb, *Jesus' Abba: The God Who Has Not Failed* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 223-224.

<sup>865</sup> Robert Hamerton-Kelly, "God the Father in the Bible," in *God as Father?* (ed. Johannes-Bap Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx) (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 101. For a deeper examination and presentation of these claims, see his fuller work, Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

<sup>866</sup> Brad Lee Van Eerden, "John's Depiction of God the Father: An Analysis of the God Language in the Fourth Gospel," in *PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global*, Dallas Theological Seminary, (2003), 3.

Christology have actually inverted the biblical authors' approach and neglected the primary point of the text.

Thompson, for example, asserts that "Jesus' Christology is theocentric."<sup>867</sup> What does she mean by this? Biblical Christology has its foundation first in Patrology; the Fatherhood of God. In John's Gospel, what has primarily been viewed and treated as being Christological is first and foremost concerned with the Father and subsequently the Son. In a book-length treatment of this topic, Thompson affirms this point and argues that Patrology is the first concern of John's Gospel, and from this understanding of God as Father, then the Christological Sonship of Jesus can be understood.<sup>868</sup> If this is true, then Dahl's claim that God the Father is the neglected factor in New Testament theology is further substantiated.<sup>869</sup> As Reeves further reveals,

The fact that Jesus is 'the Son' really says it all. Being a Son means he has a Father. . . . That is who God has revealed himself to be: not first and foremost Creator or Ruler, but Father. . . . He is Father. All the way down. Thus all that he does he does as Father. That is who he is. He creates as a Father and he rules as a Father.<sup>870</sup>

Thus, the first point of application for the academy and theological study, in general, is to restore the Fatherhood of God and His identity as Jesus and His disciples Abba to the heart of academic study. This was the central message of Jesus and the heart of His life and ministry. May Αββα ό

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<sup>867</sup> Thompson, *The Promise of the Father*, 82

<sup>868</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>869</sup> Juel and Keifert affirm this position, writing, "John speaks about God more explicitly than most NT works; God is dearly a participant in the drama recounted by John... God language is as pointed—and potentially offensive—as anywhere in the NT." Donald Juel and Patrick Keifert, "I Believe in God': A Johannine Perspective," *HBT*12 (1990): 44.

<sup>870</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012) 21-23.

Πατήρ no longer be neglected but may He be restored to the center of the academy and further theological pursuits for, “In the end, high Christology gives way to *theology* (or *patrology*).”<sup>871</sup>

*The Contemporary Church and Especially Ministers*

Demonstrated throughout this research project is the reality that in the New Testament, prayer is a central practice in the lives of believers and the local church. The Lord Jesus instructed that it would be the consistent practice for all of His disciples (Matthew 6). He personally devoted Himself often to time alone with the Father in prayer (Luke 5:16). He declared that His house would be a “house of prayer” in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 56:7; Matthew 21:13), and He taught His disciples practically how to pray (Luke 11:2). Following His example, the early church devoted themselves to prayer immediately after His ascension (Acts 1:14), and the church along with more than 3,000 new converts “devoted themselves to prayer” immediately after Pentecost (Acts 2:42). They continued this practice of fervent and unceasing prayer and intercession in the face of challenges and difficulties (Acts 12:5), and the apostles “devoted themselves to the ministry of prayer” as a central element of their unique ministries (Acts 6:4). The New Testament abounds with Apostolic prayers and as has been demonstrated, the Apostles prayed directly to God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ with the same intimacy, access, confidence, boldness, and assurance as the Lord Jesus Himself. This is only a small illustration from the New Testament of the centrality of prayer in the life of the contemporary church.

As this study has established, New Testament prayer is categorically distinct when compared with its Old Testament counterpart and the explanation is Jesus’ use of Abba Father. Because of this prioritization of prayer in the church and its development and transformation by

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<sup>871</sup> Eugene E. Lemao, “Father and Son in the Synoptics and John: A Canonical Reading,” in *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

Jesus' relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father, the second point of application is that the centrality prayer to God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ ought to be a significant element of the contemporary church.

Ministers within the church bear a dual weight of both modeling prayer as Jesus did for His disciples as well as teaching and instructing disciples to pray to God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ. First, following the example of Jesus, ministers within the local must devote themselves in such a way following the example of Christ and modeling for their disciples and congregations the same intimacy, access, confidence, boldness, and assurance in prayer with God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ that Jesus.<sup>872</sup> The prayer lives of pastors and leaders within the church ought to be so captivating in the intimacy and access that they demonstrate with God as Father that those whom they follow are compelled to ask them, just as they asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray!" The fact that the Apostles "devoted themselves to the ministry of prayer" as a central element of their unique ministries (Acts 6:4) illustrates the centrality of prayer in the church corporately and the life of the minister privately. The Apostle Paul's devotion to prayer following the example of Christ as evidenced in his own prayers further confirms this position.

Second, ministers also must teach the revolutionary approach to prayer as given to them by Christ in the Scriptures.<sup>873</sup> If the church is ever to reach Jesus' vision for her as a "house of

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<sup>872</sup> Cobb's emphasis on first living the reality of the Fatherhood of God and especially God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ and then, ministering from this place is the heart of this point of application; "For my part, I strive to be a faithful disciple of Jesus. There are those who follow Jesus without sharing his belief in Abba. I admire them, but I am convinced that the effort to follow Jesus while ignoring his Abba has a tragic character. It usually results from being socialized into a culture and a way of thinking that is not deserving of commitment. I am convinced that a much deeper and more joyful faithfulness is possible if we seek to relate to Abba as Jesus did. I commend a faithfulness to Jesus that shares Jesus' confidence in the love and empowering power of Abba."<sup>872</sup> Cobb, *Jesus' Abba*, 223-224.

<sup>873</sup> The centrality of the pastor as "Pastor Theologian" is one which falls outside the scope of this study yet has significant ramifications for the discussion here. For more on the role of the pastor as theologian within the congregation, see: Gerald Hiestand and Todd A. Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015); Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen. Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015); Todd A. Wilson and

prayer,” it will certainly include the faithful teaching and preaching of pastors and ministers concerning the nature and centrality of New Testament prayer. The wonderful news as illustrated in Jesus’ instruction to His disciples is that prayer can be learned. Thus, the central role of prayer in the church and the responsibility of ministers to both model and teach the unprecedented approach to God directly as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ with the same intimacy, access, confidence, boldness, and assurance as the Lord Jesus Himself is the second point of application.

### *Individual Believers*

The final major conclusion of this study is Jesus’ teaching is an invitation into the heart of Trinitarian love to enjoy the same intimacy and access with God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ that He did as Abba’s sons and daughters in His name empowered by the Holy Spirit. The heart of the Gospel and the central message of Jesus is that God is Father and can be approached as Abba. As Hamerton-Kelly states so well, “The intimacy and accessibility of Almighty God is *the essence of Jesus’ ‘good news.’*”<sup>874</sup> This point could not be more celebrated nor affirmed more by the research of this study. The arrival of Jesus of Nazareth represented the explosion of Father language for God in the Gospels and the New Testament and the proclamation of the wonderful reality that in and through Jesus Christ, all believers could follow His example and experience the same intimacy and access to God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ that He did. Not only this, but as Sons and daughters of God, believers can pray with the same boldness, confidence, and assurance of Jesus knowing that the Father will surely answer them. Krentz confirms this, writing,

*Abba* expressed closeness to God because it is an intimate familial term. Jesus lived in the conviction that the Father knew him, that he knew the Father, and that through him God

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Gerald Hiestand, eds., *Becoming a Pastor Theologian: New Possibilities for Church Leadership* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic / InterVarsity Press, 2016)

<sup>874</sup> Kelly, *God the Father in the Bible*, 100.

as Father is close to the disciples and known by them as a God of mercy... Jesus proclaimed the nearness of God to save.”<sup>875</sup>

Therefore, for individual believers, this study commends a Trinitarian approach to prayer in the New Testament structured around the centrality of God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ. In addition to the unprecedented and transformational teaching of Jesus concerning prayer, a Trinitarian approach to prayer centers around three major realities seen in this study. First, New Testament Prayer is addressed to God as Abba Father. The entire New Testament bears witness to this reality and it is the overwhelming presentation of God and New Testament prayer. Second, believers join the Αββα ὁ Πατήρ cry of Jesus in prayer to the Father. It is in and through adoption that believers are granted this unprecedented gift of intimacy and access to God as their Αββα ὁ Πατήρ. For, addressing God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ “Implies an intimate relationship and personal invocation.”<sup>876</sup>

Finally, a topic this dissertation scarcely addressed is that the Spirit is the one who cries “Abba” in and with believers.<sup>877</sup> The Abba cry of believers is a miracle wrought by the Holy Spirit of God. The miracle of adoption so central to Paul’s theology which began in the heart of the Father, was accomplished by the work of the Son and is applied through the Spirit (Romans 5:1-11). Thus, as the TDNT so eloquently summarizes,

The goal of Christ’s work is divine sonship by the Spirit, and that this is a new life. Divine sonship finds expression in the prayer, Abba, our Father... This is the basis of a new kind of prayer. In calling is expressed the certainty and joy with which the one who is moved by the Spirit turns to God. The address of servants, on the other hand, is the

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<sup>875</sup> Edgar Krentz, "God in the New Testament," in *Our Naming of God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 88–89.

<sup>876</sup> Khobnya, *The Father Who Redeems and the Son Who Obeys*, 59.

<sup>877</sup> For one work which treats this topic more fully, see Obeng. Obeng’s primary thesis is that “Abba Father’ is the cry of the Holy Spirit within believers and is therefore a witness of His presence within giving them the ability to cry Abba! E. A. Obeng, “Abba, Father: The Prayer of the Sons of God,” *The Expository Times*, 99(12), 1998, 363–366.

murmured prayer prescribed by Jewish custom.” Prayer in the Spirit (“Abba, dear Father”) and sonship by the Spirit are one and the same thing.<sup>878</sup>

Therefore, based upon the example and teaching of Christ, believers can adopt a Trinitarian approach to prayer structured around the centrality of God as Αββα ὁ Πατήρ, accomplished by adoption in and through Christ the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Based upon the preceding research, perhaps the most extraordinary word ever uttered which would transform the shape of human history forever was on the lips of Jesus of Nazareth when He lifted His eyes to Heaven and called Yahweh His Αββα. This unprecedented and unparalleled approach to God was central to the ministry of Jesus and the heart of His Gospel message and everything that would make His new covenant categorically and distinctly new and wonderful. The thesis which this study has sought to address is that the theological and hermeneutical key to understanding the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning prayer is His relationship with and revelation of God as Abba Father. That is, that Christian prayer is categorically distinct from Old Testament or Jewish Prayer because disciples of the Christ are invited to approach God in an unprecedented manner as their Abba Father just as the Lord Jesus did transforming the entirety of the Christian religion.

The implications are that Jesus’ teaching functions as an invitation into the heart of Trinitarian love to enjoy the same intimacy and access with Abba that He did as Abba’s sons and daughters in His name empowered by the Holy Spirit. New Testament prayer is marked by unparalleled intimacy, access, boldness, confidence, and assurance in prayer modeled by Jesus Himself and gifted to His church. As sons and daughters adopted into the family of God, New

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<sup>878</sup> Walter Grundmann, κράζω, in, Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 903.

Testament prayer is distinguished by the confident assurance that anything believers ask will be granted by the Father when they approach Him in and through Jesus the Son by the power of the Spirit. Thus, believers experience the confidence and assurance of Jesus Christ the Son of God in prayer with the promise that their Abba Father in Heaven surely will hear and answer them. More than this, the treasure of Christian prayer is that intimacy and access are available with God as Father in a manner never thought possible and expressed most clearly in the believers' prayer, Αββα ὁ Πατήρ.

Just as Greek-speaking Gentile Christians outside of Palestine retained, treasured, and continued to employ Αββα ὁ Πατήρ in a language not their own, so too modern Christians can join the age-old cry of Αββα ὁ Πατήρ uniting with Christians of all generations remembering the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus of Nazareth and experiencing the same intimacy and access with God as Abba Father that Jesus the Son did. Thus, may this study serve a new generation of Christ's disciples and empower them to join the Lord Jesus in approaching His and their Father and boldly, intimately, confidently, patiently, cry out; Αββα ὁ Πατήρ!



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